

POLITICS
AND THE INDIAN COMMUNITY
IN WEST MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE
1945 - 1957

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ABSTRACT.

Politics and the Indian Community in West Malaysia and Singapore
1945 - 1957. Rajeswary Ampalavanar.

This dissertation examines the political development of the Indian community in West Malaysia and Singapore in the period 1945 to 1957. It traces its transition from an essentially India-oriented community immediately after the Occupation to a more permanently-settled community in 1957, with a secure place in the Government of Independent Malaya. After an opening chapter outlining the main political features of the Malayan Indian community prior to 1945, the succeeding chapters, covering the period 1945-1957, are arranged thematically. They consider the impact of Indian nationalism on the local Malayan community, the politicization of Indian labour, the Indian response to the Malayan Union and the Federation Agreement, the participation of the Indians in formal politics, factionalism within the Indian community, and finally the alignment of the Malayan Indian Congress with the Alliance in the mid-1950's.

PREFACE

The political history of Malaya in the period 1945-1957 has received considerable attention from historians and political scientists in recent years. There have been two general surveys covering this period, Gordon P. Means, Malaysian Politics, (London, 1970) and R.S. Milne, Government and Politics in Malaysia, (Boston, 1967). In addition, K.J. Ratnam, Communalism and the Political Process in Malaya, (Kuala Lumpur, 1965) and R.K. Vasil, Politics in a Plural Society: A study of non-communal political parties in Malaysia (London, 1971) have sought to assess the impact of race and communalism on Malayan political developments in the post-war era. Mohamed Nordin Sopiee, From Malayan Union to Singapore Separation: Political Unification in the Malaysia Region, 1945-1965 (Kuala Lumpur, 1974) has analysed each of the major political and constitutional developments in that period, whilst J.V. de Allen, The Malayan Union, (New Haven, 1967) and A.J. Stockwell, 'The Development of Malay Politics during the Course of the Malayan Union Experiment, 1942-1948' (Ph.D. thesis, London, 1973) have examined in considerable detail the Malayan Union Scheme, and in particular the Malay response to it. Finally, left-wing movements in post-1945 Malaya have been the focus of numerous studies, though perhaps the most noteworthy are, Anthony Short, The Communist Insurrection in Malaya, 1945-60, (London, 1975) and Richard Clutterbuck, Riot and Revolution in Singapore and Malaya, 1945-1963, (London, 1973).⁽¹⁾

(1) Noel Barber, The War of the Running Dogs: how Malaya defeated the Communist guerrillas, 1948-1960, London, 1971; G. Hanrahan, The Communist Struggle in Malaya, New York, 1954; J.M. van der Kroef, Communism in Malaysia and Singapore - a contemporary survey, The Hague, 1967; Harry Miller, Menace in Malaya, London, 1954; Lucian Pye, Guerrilla Communism in Malaya: Its social and political meaning, Princeton, 1956.

To a greater or lesser extent all these works pay less attention to the Indian community than its importance would merit. For a fuller account of the political evolution of the Malayan Indian community in the post-1945 period it has hitherto been necessary to turn first to the general works on the Malayan Indians, most notably Kernial Singh Sandhu, Indians in Malaya: some aspects of their immigration and settlement, 1786-1957 (Cambridge, 1969), S. Arasaratnam, Indians in Malaysia and Singapore (London, 1970), and Usha Mahajani, The Role of Indian Minorities in Burma and Malaya, (Bombay, 1960). However, as is almost inevitable, Arasaratnam and Mahajani provide merely general surveys of the political development of the Indian community for the brief period 1945-1957 and in addition make little reference to the wider political and constitutional changes affecting the country as a whole, whilst the main emphasis of Sandhu is on Indian immigration and settlement. To some extent the gaps have been filled by R.K. Jain, South Indians on the Plantation Frontier in Malaya (Kuala Lumpur, 1970) and S. Subramaniam, 'Politics of the Indians in Malaysia, 1945-1955' (M.A. Thesis, University of Malaya, 1974) though Subramaniam concentrates almost solely on the MIC, and even then essentially on the Party's organization and structure, whilst Jain, in an anthropological study, makes only a brief reference to the political movements on the estates.

In contrast this study attempts to consider the political evolution of the Indian community as a whole in the period 1945-1957. In particular it emphasizes the class and ethnic divisions of the community and the way in which they determined the political development of the Malayan Indians in these years. More importantly the study attempts to consider the political evolution of the Indian community in the context of wider political changes as Malaya moved from Occupation to Independence, and in the context of Malay and Chinese response to those political and constitutional changes.

It would be useful at this point to outline briefly the organization of this study for the subject is treated thematically rather than chronologically. The opening chapter considers the evolution of the Malayan Indian community prior to 1945. Chapter II analyses the influence of Indian Nationalism on the Malayan Indians in the period 1945-1957. The following two chapters concentrate on the late 1940s, and examine Indian labour movements in the immediate post-war years (chapter III), and then the Indian response to the Constitutional changes of 1946-1950 (chapter IV). This second aspect is then developed further in chapter V which examines the Indian response to the political reforms of the 1950s. Therefore chapters II - V are concerned with what may be called the 'external relations' of the Indian community, the response of the community to its changing political environment. Chapter VI looks within the Indian community and considers the intra-communal divisions which arose throughout the whole period 1945-57. The following chapter (chapter VII) returns to the theme of the Indian community's 'external relations' and considers the community's move towards political alignment with the other two major races in the 1950s through the Alliance.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMCJA	All Malaya Council of Joint Action.
AMICC	All Malayan Indian Congress Committee.
ANC	Alliance National Council.
API	Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (Organization of Youth for Justice).
BMA	British Military Administration.
CCAO	Chief Civil Affairs Officer.
CFM	Ceylon Federation of Malaya.
CIAM	Central Indian Association of Malaya.
CJA	Council of Joint Action.
CLC	Communities Liaison Committee.
C. for L.	Commissioner for Labour.
CO	Colonial Office.
Cmd	Command.
DCCAO	Deputy Chief Civil Affairs Officer.
DK	Dravida Kalagam (Dravidian Federation).
FIO	Federation of Indian Organizations.
FMS	Federated Malay States.
GLU	General Labour Union.
GSi	General Staff of Intelligence.
IIL	Indian Independence League.
IMP	Independence of Malaya Party.
INA	Indian National Army.
INC	Indian National Congress.
I.S.E.A.S.	Institute of South East Asian Studies.
JMBRAS	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Malayan Branch.
JSEAH	Journal of South East Asian History

JSEAS	Journal of South East Asian Studies
KMM	Kesatuan Melayu Muda (Malay Youth Association).
KMS	Kesatuan Melayu Singapura (Singapore Malay Association).
KMT	Kuomintang.
MCA	Malayan Chinese Association.
MCP	Malayan Communist Party.
MCS	Malayan Civil Service.
MDU	Malayan Democratic Union.
MIA	Malayan Indian Association.
MIC	Malayan Indian Congress.
MLP	Malayan Labour Party.
MNP	Malay Nationalist Party.
MPAJA	Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army.
MPIEA	Malayan Planting Industries Employers' Association.
MSS	Malayan Security Service.
MTUC	Malayan Trade Union Congress.
MU	Malayan Union.
N.A.	National Archives.
NDYL	New Democratic Youth League
NIDYL	New Indian Democratic Youth League
NUPW	National Union of Plantation Workers.
OCPD	Officer in Charge of Police Depot.
PAP	Peoples Action Party.
PEEU	Perak Estate Employees Union.
PETA	Pembela Tanah Ayer (Avengers of the Country).
PMDF	Pan-Malayan Dravidian Federation.
PMFTU	Pan Malayan Federation of Trade Unions.
PMIP	Pan-Malayan Islamic Party.
PMU	Peninsula Malays Union.

PPP	Perak Progressive Party, later Peoples' Progressive Party.
Putera	Pusat Tenaga Raayat (Nucleus of Peoples Force).
R.G.A.	Rubber Growers Association.
SAC	Supreme Allied Commander.
SCAO	Senior Civil Affairs Officer.
SCTA	Selangor Ceylon Tamils Association.
SIA	Singapore Indian Association.
SLP	Selangor Labour Party.
SRIC	Singapore Regional Indian Congress.
SS	Straits Settlements.
TRA	Tamil Reform Association.
TRC	Tamils Representative Council.
UMNO	United Malays National Organization.
UPAM	United Planters Association of Malaya.
WC	Working Committee.

CONTENTS

Abstract.	2.
Preface.	3.
Acknowledgements.	6.
List of Abbreviations.	7.
1. The Setting: The Indian Community In Malaya Prior to 1945.	11.
11. India, Indian Nationalism, And The Indian Community In Malaya, 1945-1957.	31.
111. Indian Labour 1945-1957.	67.
1V. Malayan Union to Federation Agreement: The Indian Response.	105.
V. Indian Participation In Politics: Political Reform And The Indian Response.	138.
V1. Factionalism In The Indian Community In Malaya, 1945-1957.	192.
V11. The MIC And The Alliance: Transition to Communal Politics.	231.
Conclusion.	256.
Glossary.	265.
Select Bibliography.	267.

LIST OF TABLES

1. Singapore: Composition of Registered Voters in 1948.	163.
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The Setting: The Indian Community In Malaya Prior To 1945

Large-scale migration of Indians from the sub-continent to Malaya followed the extension of British formal rule to the west coast Malay states in the 1870s.⁽¹⁾ As early as 1901, the Indian population in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States was approximately 120,000, and by 1947 it had grown to almost 600,000 for Malaya and Singapore.⁽²⁾ On Independence in 1957 it stood at a little over 820,000. In this last year, Indians accounted for approximately eleven per cent of the total population of Malaya and Singapore.⁽³⁾

The overwhelming majority of migrants from India were Tamil-speakers from the south of the sub-continent. In 1947 they represented approximately seventy-seven per cent of the total Indian population in Malaya and Singapore.⁽⁴⁾ Other South Indians, mainly Malayalee and Telegus, formed a further fourteen per cent in 1947, and the remainder of the Indian community was accounted

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- (1) The standard work on British intervention from 1874 is, C.D. Cowan, Nineteenth-Century Malaya: the origins of British political control, London, 1961.
- (2) S. Arasaratnam, Indians in Malaysia and Singapore, London, 1970, p. 28; M.V. Del Tufo, Malaya, A Report on the 1947 Census of Population, London, 1949, p.40. There are two standard general works on the Indian community in Malaya, K.S. Sandhu, Indians in Malaya: some aspects of their immigration and settlement, 1786-1957, Cambridge, 1969; Arasaratnam, op.cit.
- (3) Federation of Malaya, The 1957 Census - A Preliminary Report Based on 'First Count Total' Returns, Kuala Lumpur, 1957, p.4.
- (4) Del Tufo, op.cit., p. 78.

for by North Indians, principally Punjabis, Bengalis, Gujeratis and Sindhis.⁽⁵⁾ These ethnic divisions corresponded closely to occupational specialization. For example, the South Indian Tamils were predominantly labourers; the majority were employed on rubber estates, though a significant minority worked in Government public works departments.⁽⁶⁾ The Telegus were also mainly labourers on the estates. However the Malayalee community was divided into those who occupied relatively more skilled labouring positions on the estates and those who were white-collar workers or professionals.⁽⁷⁾ The North Indians with the exception of the Sikhs were mainly merchants and businessmen; for example, the Gujeratis and Sindhis owned some of the most important textile firms in Malaya and Singapore.⁽⁸⁾ The Sikhs were either in the police or employed as watchmen.⁽⁹⁾ There were, in addition, three further ethnic and religious groups, whose political and economic importance in Malaya far exceeded their numerical strength. Two were important business communities - the Chettiars, a money-lending caste from Madras, and the South Indian Muslims (Moplahs and Marakkayars) who were mainly wholesalers.⁽¹⁰⁾ The third group were the Ceylonese Tamils who were employed principally in the lower levels of the Civil Service and in the professions.⁽¹¹⁾

(5) Ibid.

(6) Sandhu, op.cit., p. 159.

(7) Ibid.

(8) Amarjit Kaur, 'North Indians in Malaya: A Study of their Economic, Social and Political Activities with Special Reference to Selangor, 1870s-1940s', M.A. Thesis, University of Malaya, 1973, p. 75-80.

(9) Ibid., pp. 63-70.

(10) Arasaratnam, op.cit., pp. 35-37.

(11) Ibid., pp. 33-34.

The close correspondence between the ethnic and occupational divisions of the Indian community was inevitably reflected in the community's geographical distribution in Malaya. The South Indian Tamils were concentrated mainly in Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan, on the rubber estates and railways, though a significant proportion found employment on the docks in Penang and Singapore.⁽¹²⁾ The Telegus were mainly on the rubber estates of Lower Perak and parts of Selangor, while the Malayalees were located predominantly in Lower Perak, Kuala Lumpur, parts of Negri Sembilan and Johore Bharu.⁽¹³⁾ The business communities - the Gujaratis, Sindhis, Chettiars and South Indian Muslims, were naturally, concentrated in the urban areas, principally Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Ipoh and Singapore.⁽¹⁴⁾ The Ceylon Tamils were also mainly an urban community, though some were found in rural areas working as subordinate staff on the estates.⁽¹⁵⁾

One further characteristic of the Indian community in Malaya should be noted, that is, its caste divisions. Over one-third of the immigrants from Madras were untouchables, the remainder being agricultural caste groups and a very tiny group were Brahmins.⁽¹⁶⁾ As in India, caste provided an important basis for social identity, particularly in marriage, and it also affected political alignments within the community. For example, in the 1940s and 1950s left-wing

(12) Del Tufo, op.cit., p. 79.

(13) Ibid.

(14) Ibid.

(15) Ibid., p. 81.

(16) Arasaratnam, op.cit., p. 26.

organizations and militant Tamil groups were able to exploit the caste grievances of the estate workers to challenge the higher caste Indian elite.

Compared with the period after 1945, the Indian community in Malaya in the inter-war years was politically quiescent, and the relatively few occasions when it was aroused to political action was usually in response to initiatives from India rather than to events in Malaya. The sporadic nature of Indian political activity can be easily explained. First, in this period, the Indians in Malaya were still essentially a transitory community. It was common for Indians of all classes, particularly the merchants, to return frequently to India for short periods. Inevitably, this continually reinforced the India-orientation of the Malayan Indian community, particularly as the British authorities in Malaya did little to encourage Indians to evolve a local identity. The frequent visits to India also exposed the community to political movements on the sub-continent. Second, the diverse nature of the Indian 'community' in Malaya, divided along class, caste and ethnic lines, prevented the development of a cohesive Indian political force in Malaya. Moreover, these divisions ensured that political impulses from the varying regions of India affected only the corresponding ethnic and religious group in Malaya, and not the Indian community as a whole.

It would appear that the first Indian political movement to affect the community in Malaya was the Ghadr Party, though in fact the Party had its base in North America.⁽¹⁷⁾ The Ghadr Party concentrated its propaganda on North Indians, in particular, the police and sepoys, in an attempt to instigate a rising against the Raj. This propaganda bore fruit in the Singapore Mutiny of February 1915 when

(17) For details on the Ghadr Party propaganda in Malaya, see Khoo Kay Kim, 'The Beginnings of Political Extremism in Malaya, 1915-1935', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1973, pp. 18-19; Amarjit Kaur, op.cit., pp. 263-265.

Pathan, Rajput, Sikh and Punjabi soldiers led a violent, though quickly crushed, revolt against their British officers.⁽¹⁸⁾ The outbreak of the mutiny was due mainly to anger amongst the Muslim soldiers at Britain's actions in Turkey (a fellow Muslim state), and at the British authorities ill-treatment of a group of 'revolutionary' Sikhs who, at one point, had attempted to land in Singapore.⁽¹⁹⁾ The Ghadrates were able to play on these grievances.

The Malayan Sikhs remained a focus of Indian propaganda after the First World War. First, subversive groups were able to exploit that community's bitter anger over the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre in Amritsar in April 1919.⁽²⁰⁾ Second, the Akali movement in India between 1919-1924, which aimed to wrest control of the Sikh temples (gurudwaras) from the Sikh priests supported by the British authorities, provoked considerable anti-British sentiments among both the local Sikhs and those in Malaya.⁽²¹⁾ Finally, the Sikh community in Malaya was seriously affected by a division which occurred in the community in India between the Majha and Malwa Sikhs.⁽²²⁾ The rift was along regional lines. It caused considerable concern to the authorities in Malaya for it threatened the unity of the Sikh-dominated Federated Malay States and Straits Settlements Police force.⁽²³⁾

(18) Khoo Kay Kim, op.cit., pp. 9-29. Amarjit Kaur, op.cit., pp. 173-204; Donald and Joanna Moore, The First 150 Years of Singapore, Singapore, 1969, pp. 549-561.

(19) See Khuswant Singh, A History of the Sikhs, New Jersey, 1966, vol. II, p. 178.

(20) Ibid., p. 166; Amarjit Kaur, op.cit., p. 268.

(21) Amarjit Kaur, op.cit., pp. 269-270.

(22) Ibid., pp. 244-245.

(23) Ibid; for more details on the Federated Malay States and Straits Settlements Police Force see, Abdul Karim bin Bagoo, 'The Origin and Growth of the Malay States Guides', B.A. (hons) Academic Exercise, University of Malaya in Singapore, 1954; A.E. Young, The Federation of Malaya and Its Police, 1786-1952, Kuala Lumpur, 1952.

A further major Indian political movement which had an impact on the Malayan community in the early 1920s was the Khilafat movement.⁽²⁴⁾ The movement was founded by two brothers, Shaukat and Mohammed Ali, in response to the dismemberment of the Turkish Empire following the end of the First World War. Three features of the movement's influence in Malaya should be noted. First, it produced a brief period of Muslim-Hindu cooperation.⁽²⁵⁾ Second, Khilafat sympathizers in Singapore attempted to enlist the support of Jawi Pernakans and Arabs, though this failed because of the firm Anglophile sentiments of these groups.⁽²⁶⁾ Third, as the majority of bookshops in Malaya and Singapore were owned by Indian Muslims, the Khilafat movement produced a wave of seditious literature in the country.⁽²⁷⁾ The movement collapsed in the mid-1920s following the abolition of the Caliphate.

With regard to the South Indian Tamils in this period, Indian influence came mainly from the 'Self-Respect' and Dravida Munnetra Kalagam (D M K) movements of Madras. The visit to Malaya of E.V. Ramasamy Naicker, a leader of the 'Self-Respect' movement, in 1929 led to a proliferation of Tamil associations, dedicated to moral, religious and social reform.⁽²⁸⁾ These associations led mainly by journalists, school-teachers and kanganies, achieved some measure of success in eradicating kavadi bearing, self-immolation, and in popularizing monogamous marriages.⁽²⁹⁾ Towards the end of this

(24) Khoo Kay Kim, op.cit., pp. 55-56

(25) Ibid., p. 56

(26) Ibid., p. 55

(27) Ibid., p. 56

(28) R. Ampalavanar, 'Social and Political Developments in the Indian Community of Malaya, 1920-41', M.A. Thesis, University of Malaya, 1969, pp. 46-58, 64.

(29) Ibid.

period, the influences from Madras became increasingly political in character, and began to penetrate the Indian labouring classes on the estates and in the public services.⁽³⁰⁾ There were three particularly serious outbreaks of labour militancy in the later 1930s - a railway strike in Kuala Lumpur in 1936, a strike in the Batu Arang Collieries, also in 1936, and in the Singapore Traction Company two years later.⁽³¹⁾ The principal instigators in each case were left-wing organizations, most notably the Chinese-dominated MCP, though the influence of left-wing Indian Nationalist groups was also evident, particularly in the Batu Arang Collieries and in the Singapore Traction Company.

Indeed, it can be argued that Indian Nationalism was more effective in arousing Indian working class militancy, principally because Indian workers were suspicious of the Chinese-led MCP. At first Indian workers associations were led by better educated Indians, prominent among whom were Tamil journalists.⁽³²⁾ However by 1940 a new group of Indian working class leaders had emerged, young and radical labourers.⁽³³⁾ This new group came into prominence in 1941 when strikes occurred on the Klang estates. Labour unrest had been common on the Klang estates from the late 1930s, mainly as a result of the activities of the Klang Indian Association led by R.H. Nathan, the sub-editor of the Tamil Nesan, and Y.K. Menon, who worked for a European company in Port Swettenham.⁽³⁴⁾ The 1941 strikes began in

(30) Ibid., pp. 156-161.

(31) Ibid; M.R. Stenson, Industrial Conflict in Malaya: Prelude to the Communist Revolt of 1948, London, 1970, pp. 19-26.

(32) Ampalavanar, op.cit., pp. 113-118.

(33) Stenson, op.cit., p. 27.

(34) Ibid., pp. 29-33.

January and soon spread throughout Selangor and Negri Sembilan. The workers demanded not simply an increase in wages and an improvement in living conditions, but also questioned the treatment of Asian workers on the estates, European control of the industry, and indeed the British presence in Malaya.⁽³⁵⁾ Nathan was arrested and charged with being a Communist and attempting to subvert the Indian workers.⁽³⁶⁾ These charges were never substantiated though this did not prevent Nathan from being banished to India. The strikes, though quickly crushed by vigorous police action, lasted long enough to establish a clear political consciousness among the hitherto rather apathetic estate workers. Vernacular educated radicals, working with kanganies and the Tamil teachers in the estate schools, successfully encouraged the tappers to question the basic causes of their depressed economic and social position. This was to be of considerable importance in the immediate postwar years.

The political movements so far described affected only working class or lower middle-class Indians - the Tamil labourer, Muslim petty trader and the Sikh policeman. At the other end of the social spectrum of the Indian community, two principal factions can be observed. First, there was a conservative faction, the wealthy, English-educated professionals, separated from the Indian masses by class, ethnic, caste and cultural distinctions.⁽³⁷⁾ The great majority were Ceylon Tamils, Bengalis or Malayalees. These Indians preferred to petition the authorities on issues relevant solely to their own interests, rather than to use their position to mobilize

(35) Ibid., p. 29.

(36) Malaya Tribune, 26 May 1941.

(37) R. Ampalavanar, 'Class, Caste and Ethnicism Among Urban Indians in Malaya, 1920-41', Nusantara, No. 2 July 1972, pp. 211-213.

the Indian community as a whole. It was from this group that the British drew for Indian representation on official councils and committees, and this widened still further the gap between the Indian masses and this Indian elite.⁽³⁸⁾ Indeed, service on such councils proved, for the majority, so mentally debilitating, that when an important issue arose where their voice may have been important, they rarely responded. As a result they came to be ignored by their own community. For example, in 1933 when the Chettiars were concerned about the implications for their money-lending business of a Malay Reservations Amendment Act, they appealed to Tan Cheng Lock and E.D. Shearman rather than to Indian representatives to secure repeal of the legislation.⁽³⁹⁾

Typical of the political activity of this elite was a campaign it mounted in the 1930s to secure greater employment opportunities for non-Malays in the government service.⁽⁴⁰⁾ These opportunities had been threatened by the policies pursued by the High Commissioners for the Federated Malay States, Laurence Guillemard and Cecil Clementi.⁽⁴¹⁾ The only part of the Indian community affected by this issue was of course the English-educated elite themselves. During the Japanese Occupation, the intense pro-British loyalties of this elite prevented them from aligning themselves with the nationalist radicals in the Indian Independence League. By the post-war period they had become a political anachronism.

(38) Arasaratnam, *op.cit.*, pp. 86-87.

(39) Proceedings of the Federal Council, 1933, B132, 161-164.

(40) Ampalavanar, 'Social and Political Developments in the Indian Community of Malaya, 1920-41', pp. 307-318.

(41) W.R. Roff, The Origins of Malay Nationalism, Kuala Lumpur, 1967, pp. 114-118.

The second elite faction^{was} composed of radical nationalists. The majority were lawyers, heavily influenced by the ideology of the Indian National Congress.⁽⁴²⁾ In the 1920s and 1930s they dominated Indian Associations throughout Malaya and Singapore, but it was not until the formation of the Central Indian Association of Malaya (CIAM) in 1936 that they became an effective political force.⁽⁴³⁾ The CIAM concentrated its activities on the labourers in an attempt to establish strong trade-union organizations on the estates and in public service industries.⁽⁴⁴⁾ It met with limited success, partly because of government restrictions on trade union activity, and partly because the Indian workers regarded the CIAM leaders with some suspicion. However the CIAM involved itself in the Klang Strikes of 1941, giving legal aid to labourers who had been victimized by the authorities and employers.⁽⁴⁵⁾ It could be argued that the CIAM found it easier to secure improvements for the Indian labourers by putting pressure on the Government of India rather than on the authorities in Malaya itself. For example, in 1938 it persuaded the Indian Government to impose a ban on further immigration to Malaya.⁽⁴⁶⁾ This threatened the supply of labour to the estates and was in response to an attempt by the United Planters Association of Malaya to cut estate wages.⁽⁴⁷⁾

(42) Arasaratnam, op.cit., p. 98.

(43) Ibid., pp. 99-102.

(44) Stenson, op.cit., pp. 26-30.

(45) Ibid., pp. 28-30, 122-123.

(46) J.N. Parmer, Colonial Labour Policy and Administration: a history of Labour in the rubber plantation industry in Malaya, c. 1910-1941, New York, 1960, p. 213.

(47) Ibid.

The CIAM leaders inevitably became involved in the Indian Independence League on its formation in 1942.⁽⁴⁸⁾ The League, formed by an exiled Indian extremist, Rash Behari Bose, was sponsored by the Japanese, and fought from Malaya for Indian independence. The military wing of the Indian Independence League was the Indian National Army, under Mohan Singh. The League was strongly influenced by the Indian National Congress and this was reflected in their choice of flag, their national anthem (Bande Mataram), and in the general tenor of their propaganda.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Though the League was strongly opposed to communalism, and indeed forced the closure of a number of communal organizations in Malaya, the dominating influence of the Indian National Congress, inevitably alienated the Indian Muslims.⁽⁵⁰⁾ The deterioration of Hindu-Muslim relations during the Japanese Occupation continued into the postwar years.⁽⁵¹⁾

The most important legacy of the League was the politicization of the Indian working classes in Malaya. Through public meetings, radio broadcasts, books, mass processions and politically-motivated strikes, the Indian community was mobilized.⁽⁵²⁾ By July 1944 well over half the Indian population belonged to the Indian Independence League.⁽⁵³⁾

(48) Dr. Lukshemeyah (Selangor), B.K. Das (Perak), Dr. Majumdar (Negri Sembilan), S. Shanmugam (Malacca), N. Raghavan (Penang), S.C. Goho (Singapore) were CIAM Presidents of the separate states in 1936 and were made Indian Independence League Presidents of these respective states in 1942.

(49) G.P. Ramachandra, 'The Indian Independence Movement in Malaya, 1942-45', M.A. Thesis, University of Malaya, 1970, p. 93.

(50) Ibid., pp. 91-92.

(51) See chapter II, pp. 49-53

(52) Ramachandra, op.cit., p. 263.

(53) Ibid.

There were branches in every state, even in outlying rural areas. The arrival of Subhas Chandra Bose in Malaya in July 1943 as leader of the League had an electrifying effect, not only on the Indian community but also on sections of the Malay and Chinese. Bose's birthday was celebrated by mass processions and propaganda displays: he became a cult figure.⁽⁵⁴⁾

During this time, Bose established a Provisional Independent Government of India, which gave the League an aura of authority.⁽⁵⁵⁾ He also began recruiting civilian volunteers into the Indian National Army and though most were driven by nationalist fervour, many were also forced by poverty to join the army.⁽⁵⁶⁾ Large sums of money were collected in Malaya for the independence campaign, though donations were not always given voluntarily. There was, in particular, strong resistance from Indian Muslims against contributing to the League. Even so, it is estimated that Malaya contributed about #30 million to the League's coffers, though Burma, where the Chettiars were prominent provided #50 million.⁽⁵⁷⁾

The defeat of the Indian National Army at Imphal in Burma in June 1944, and the withdrawal of the Japanese from Malaya in August 1945, broke the Indian Independence League.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Many of the Indian Independence League leaders faced charges of collaboration when the British returned to Malaya.⁽⁵⁹⁾ They were all acquitted, whereupon

(54) Syonan Shimbun, 24 January 1945; M. Sivaram, The Road to Delhi, Tokyo, 1966, pp. 133-134.

(55) J.C. Lebra, 'Japanese Policy and the Indian National Army', Paper submitted to the International Conference of Asian History in Kuala Lumpur, 1968, p. 10.

(56) Ramachandra, *op.cit.*, p. 219.

(57) K.S. Giani, Indian Independence Movement in East Asia, Lahore, 1947, p. 102.

(58) Ramachandra, *op.cit.*, pp. 249-50.

(59) See chapter II, pp. 31-33.

the newly-independent Government in India, recognising their contributions to the independence movement, rewarded them with senior diplomatic posts.⁽⁶⁰⁾ This left a serious leadership vacuum amongst the community in Malaya. However, as has been shown earlier, the Occupation had produced a new group of Indian leaders from among the workers themselves. Kanganies and young labourers, who had joined the Indian National Army, had become imbued with a strong commitment to radical economic and political change.⁽⁶¹⁾ This group formed the core of the post-war non-communal Pan Malayan Federation of Trade Unions (PMFTU).⁽⁶²⁾

In addition, ex-Indian National Army members formed purely Indian trade unions amongst the estate workers in Negri Sembilan, Perak, Kedah and Johore; the group later formed the core of the National Union of Plantation Workers (NUPW).⁽⁶³⁾ Moreover, ex-members of the Indian National Army were prominent in the emergence of the Thondar Padai, a movement dedicated to improving working conditions on the estates and to defying the European paternalism, which, they argued, had inhibited the development of workers' political consciousness before 1941.⁽⁶⁴⁾ The authoritarianism

(60) See chapter II, pp. 32-33.

(61) Stenson, op.cit., p. 57.

(62) S. Ganapathy, ex-Indian National Army Instructor and P. Veerasenan, another activist in the Indian Independence League, became President of the PMFTU and Vice-President of the Singapore PMFTU respectively.

(63) Important here were P.P. Narayanan, K.R. Choudhuri, S. Pillai, S.P.S. Nathan and S.V.K. Murthi.

(64) See chapter III, pp. 74-76.

inherited from the Indian National Army, suited well the rather dictatorial character of the Thondar Padai. The final legacy of the League was a strong commitment to continue the independence struggle, not only for India but also for Malaya itself. For many Indian National Army members, notably S. Ganapathy and P. Veerasenan, this eventually led them into the MCP.⁽⁶⁵⁾ However even the MIC, certainly a less militant organization, was heavily influenced by an anti-colonial ideology inherited from the League. The contrast with the attitudes of the Indian political elite of the pre-war years could not have been more obvious.

The other major immigrant community in Malaya - the Chinese - were also strongly influenced by political developments overseas in the pre-war period. It would appear that the first major political impulse from China which affected the local Chinese community was the anti-Manchu movement of the first decade of this century. In 1906, anti-Manchu associations were found in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Seremban.⁽⁶⁶⁾ Following the fall of the Manchu dynasty in 1911, Kuomintang (KMT) branches were formed in the Straits Settlements in 1912, and on the mainland, from 1913.⁽⁶⁷⁾ These branches were dominated by rich merchants. In 1925 the KMT was banned in Malaya because the authorities feared that it might become an anti-British movement, though the ban was lifted five years later.⁽⁶⁸⁾

(65) See chapter III, pp. 69-72.

(66) V. Purcell, The Chinese in Malaya, London, 1948, p. 209.

(67) For an account of the Kuomintang organization in Malaya, see Png Poh Seng, 'The Kuomintang in Malaya, 1912-1941', JSEAH Vol. 2, No.1, March 1961, pp. 1-32.

(68) *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 29.

With the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937 the Kuomintang's activities in Malaya expanded greatly.⁽⁶⁹⁾ The British authorities tolerated KMT demonstrations, the collection of funds, and the formation of the Chinese Anti-Enemy Backing Societies, because they favoured the virulent anti-Japanese stance of the Party.⁽⁷⁰⁾

The second major political influence from China in this period was that of the Chinese Communist Party. The earliest Communist influence appears to have been introduced into Malaya in the late 1920s by left-wing refugees from Java, who had fled the East Indies following the unsuccessful revolt of 1925.⁽⁷¹⁾ These were, without exception, non-Chinese speakers, who therefore had little impact on the local Chinese community.⁽⁷²⁾ However, at almost the same time, agents of the Chinese Communist Party arrived in Malaya and soon formed Communist groups among the Chinese coolies and servants.⁽⁷³⁾ As a result the split of the KMT in 1927 was reflected in Malaya, and 1931 saw the formation of the MCP, with the avowed intention of establishing the Soviet Republic of Malaya.⁽⁷⁴⁾ The MCP was soon active among the labourers, and was deeply involved in the mass demonstrations and strikes which occurred in the Batu Arang Collieries in 1936.⁽⁷⁵⁾ As with the KMT, the MCP expanded

(69) Ibid., p. 29.

(70) V. Purcell, The Chinese in South East Asia, London 1965, p. 302; Yuen Choy Leng, 'Expansion of Japanese Interests in Malaya, 1900-1941', M.A. Thesis, University of Malaya, 1973, pp. 137, 146, 163-165. It was reported that between July 1937 and November 1940 Malaya sent \$146 million towards China Relief. Here the KMT, the MCP, the Chinese guilds and associations made heavy contributions.

(71) G. Hanrahan, The Communist Struggle in Malaya, New York, 1954, p.6.

(72) Ibid.

(73) Ibid., p. 7-10.

(74) Ibid., p. 10.

(75) Stenson, op.cit., pp. 15, 19.

considerably after 1937 as an anti-Japanese movement and by the outbreak of the Pacific War could present itself as the most powerful indigenous political force in Malaya.⁽⁷⁶⁾

With regard to the Malay community in the pre-war period, three distinct political factions can be discerned.⁽⁷⁷⁾ First, there were the religious reformists, mainly Jawi-Pernakans and Arabs in the Straits Settlements. These groups controlled the Malay Press, through which they propagated their ideas of Islamic modernization.⁽⁷⁸⁾ They had little influence on the rural Malay community, for they were urbanized sophisticates who maintained close links with the Middle-East, wrote mainly for urban non-Malay Muslims, and rejected the animistic accretions of rural Malay religion. The second faction comprised vernacular educated, radical Malays. The majority had rural, working-class origins, and had been educated at Sultan Idris Training College and, in some cases, in seminaries in the Middle-East.⁽⁷⁹⁾ They used Islam to propagate a radical form of Malay Nationalism. In the 1930s they were strongly influenced by the Indonesian Nationalist movement, and in 1938 formed the Kesatuan Melayu Muda (KMM), which aimed at an Independent Malaya through union with Indonesia.⁽⁸⁰⁾ But as with the religious

(76) Wang Gung Wu, 'Chinese Politics in Malaya', The China Quarterly, No. 43, July-September 1970, p.11.

(77) The pioneering work on Malay Nationalism in the pre-war period is W.R. Roff, The Origins of Malay Nationalism, Kuala Lumpur, 1967, which contains the best account of these Malay political elites.

(78) Ibid., Chapter 2.

(79) Ibid., Chapter 5.

(80) G.P. Means, Malaysian Politics, London, 1970, p. 88; A.J. Stockwell, 'The Development of Malay Politics during the Course of the Malayan Union Experiment, 1942-48', Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1973, pp. 35, 211, 221.

reformists this faction also failed to have any significant impact on the rural Malay population, whilst its republicanism alienated the third faction, the Malay aristocrats.⁽⁸¹⁾ This latter faction, which was predominantly English-educated, was employed mainly in the government service, and was essentially pro-British. Their political objectives concentrated on ensuring the survival of the Malay community in the face of non-Malay encroachments.⁽⁸²⁾ They too failed to build mass support among the rural community, for this was effectively ruled out by their western education and their elitist political philosophy.

The Japanese Occupation had three principal effects on Malay society. First, the Malay aristocracy, almost without exception, collaborated with the occupying forces.⁽⁸³⁾ Second, the Malay radicals, essentially the Kesatuan Melayu Muda, vacillated between 'collaboration' with the Japanese in the early 1940s and working with the Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) after 1944.⁽⁸⁴⁾ Third, when it became evident that the Japanese were losing the war, the MPAJA, a Chinese-dominated organization, mounted a terror campaign against the rural Malay population, partly to revenge earlier Malay support for the Japanese.⁽⁸⁵⁾ The village Malays, abandoned by both the conservative and radical Malay elites, turned for protection to the penghulu, the village Ulama, and to invulnerability cults.⁽⁸⁶⁾

(81) Ibid., p. 89.

(82) Roff, op.cit., Chapter 4.

(83) M.N. Soviee, From Malayan Union to Singapore Separation: Political Unification in the Malaysia Region, 1945-1965, Kuala Lumpur, 1974, pp. 14, 22, 27.

(84) Stockwell, op.cit., pp. 213-232.

(85) Ibid., p. 263.

(86) Ibid., pp. 262-279.

In short, in 1945, the political characters of the three main communities in Malaya were substantially different. The MCP had radicalized the young working-class Chinese, and in so doing had become a major political force. The Indian Independence League had performed a similar function with young working-class Indians, but the collapse of the League had left its followers without leadership and consequently they were easily attracted into the MCP. For both the Chinese and Indian conservative elites, the success of these left-wing movements had left them politically isolated. The politicization of the rural Malay community had proceeded along different lines and at a slower pace. Physically threatened by the Japanese and then by the MPAJA, it had turned to traditional village modes of protection. It had few links with urban Malay society.

For the first seven months of re-imposed British rule (September 1945 - March 1946), Malaya was under the British Military Administration (BMA).⁽⁸⁷⁾ The BMA was highly authoritarian, as its essential aim was to restore law and order in preparation for the return of civilian rule. Though the BMA established Advisory Councils, these were packed with local aristocrats and businessmen, and in any case they were granted no effective power.⁽⁸⁸⁾ More seriously, the new administration was, in general, inefficient, ill-disciplined and frequently corrupt.⁽⁸⁹⁾

(87) For a sketch of the structure of the British Military Administration, see Martin Rudner, 'The Organization of the British Military Administration in Malaya', JSEAH, vol. 9, No.1, March 1968, pp. 95-106.

(88) In a letter to his subordinates, the Senior Civil Affairs Officer (SCAO) wrote of the Penang Advisory Council, 'we are in a state of authoritative Military Government and we do not delegate our authorities or power to anyone else'. M.U. (Secretariat) File 170/46, letter dated 10 January 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(89) M.U.(Secretariat) File 114/46, private letter of BMA official dated 24 October 1945 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur); Rudner, op.cit., p.102; Malayan Post, 21 January 1946, in M.U.(Secretariat) File 364/46 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

BMA officials engaged in rehabilitation work were frequently frustrated by bureaucratic delays. Moreover, many of the BMA officials lacked commitment in their work, for they were fully aware that they would soon be posted out of Malaya.⁽⁹⁰⁾ The officials were also confused by the attitude taken by their superiors towards Malayan 'collaborators'.⁽⁹¹⁾ Frequent raping and looting by troops, particularly Indian sepoys, did little to salvage morale.⁽⁹²⁾

At the same time it must be acknowledged that the BMA was faced with appalling conditions. Not only was there considerable economic dislocation as a result of the war, but from late 1945 the MCP embarked on a campaign of severe industrial unrest.⁽⁹³⁾ The Communist's call for the introduction of democratic rights and social welfare programmes found an immediate response among a population suffering from widespread unemployment and soaring food prices.⁽⁹⁴⁾ The BMA dealt with labour unrest harshly. The police and troops were frequently in action and a Trade Union Bill of 1940 was used to prevent strikes in essential services.⁽⁹⁵⁾ Though the BMA admitted that 'the strikers' demands were first and foremost for an increased rice ration', the administration was prone to diagnose all too quickly agitation and subversion and to pay less heed to legitimate

(90) Malaya Tribune, 6 September 1946.

(91) Malayan Post, 17 January 1946; Straits Times, 10 September 1945.

(92) New Democracy, 3 November 1945, Min Sheng Pao, 18 October 1945, 22 October 1945, in BMA (Information Department) File 32A/45, Press Summaries, 3/6 Part III and IV (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(93) Stenson, op.cit., Chapter VI.

(94) BMA File C/1/1/4, Telegram 31 October 1945 from BMA (Malaya) to BMA (Hqrs.), (N.A. Kuala Lumpur). Sin Chiew Jit Poh, 19 February 1946 (MPD, February 1946); Hanrahan, op.cit., pp. 94-95.

(95) Straits Times, 1 November 1945; BMA Advisory Council Proceedings, 14 November 1945.

economic grievances.⁽⁹⁶⁾ Such heavy-handed methods and clumsy analysis did little to secure working class support for the administration.⁽⁹⁷⁾

In brief, the failure of the BMA, to deal effectively with deteriorating economic conditions in the immediate post-war period, and diffuse labour unrest, gave a further stimulus to the radical working class movements which had arisen during the late 1930s and the Japanese Occupation. In 1946 the returning civilian authorities were faced by a militant, extreme Indian community, particularly the Indian labouring community, which had clear left-wing sympathies, and was committed to industrial and political action.

(96) BMA monthly report, December 1945, p. 16. BMA (Malaya) File C/1/1/2, Fortnightly report, 31 October 1945, p. 5 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur); Malaya Tribune, 11 January 1946, 28 March 1946, 20 April 1947.

(97) BMA File C/1/1/2, 25th Indian Division Weekly Intelligence Review, week ending 28 November 1945, p. 6 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

India, Indian Nationalism, And The Indian Community In Malaya,
1945-1957

(i)

During the Japanese Occupation a significant proportion of the Indian community had been involved to some degree with the Indian Independence League, or its military wing, the Indian National Army (INA). Consequently in the immediate post-war period, the community was deeply concerned over possible actions which the British would take with 'collaborators'. Indeed in late 1945, the BMA arrested many League officials, including the Chairmen of all the state branches in Malaya and those who had held important positions in Bose's Cabinet.⁽¹⁾ However the British soon decided to deal leniently with suspected 'collaborators'.⁽²⁾ In part this was due to the fact that the INA trials in India itself had caused a major uproar, and also that in Malaya, most Malaysians, except members of the MCP, had cooperated and often collaborated with the Japanese. Yet the authorities felt bound to take some action against 'collaborators' and therefore decided to punish those who had been found guilty of criminal offences.⁽³⁾

In the case of the Indian community this meant that in the majority of cases, severe action was taken against only rank and file members of the League.⁽⁴⁾ This was essentially because the lower

(1) BMA File 506/38, 'Collaboration'; BMA (Publicity/Propaganda) File 32/45 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(2) Malaya Tribune, 18 January 1946.

(3) BMA File 506/38, 'Collaboration' (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(4) M.U. (Secretariat) File 43/46 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

levels of the League had been composed mainly of Indian troops, police and labourers who had been easily subverted by Indian terrorist organizations such as the Ghadr Party and extremist Congress elements. (5) The League elite not having engaged in terrorist activities, was dealt with leniently. Even so many members of the Indian elite were sufficiently tainted by charges of collaboration to cause them to withdraw from local politics or return to India, confident of their earlier role in the Indian Independence campaign. (6) In this way the Indian Government absorbed many of the League's intellectuals, such as N. Raghavan, who had been Minister for Finance in the Provisional Government under Bose. Raghavan was despatched as Indian Ambassador to Russia in 1947. (7) In the same period S. Kannampillay became Indian Ambassador to Indonesia, K.P.K. Menon (former Minister for Information in the League) was appointed High Commissioner to Ceylon, and John Thivy, ex-Chairman of the League, later became Ambassador to Mauritius. (8) Of those who remained in Malaya, Dr. Lukshemeyah, B.K. Das and Dr. N.K. Menon withdrew from local politics, though in 1949 Dr. Menon was drawn into local affairs by his appointment to the Penang Settlement Council. (9)

S.C. Goho, who had been head of the League in Singapore during the war underwent several changes of fortune in the postwar years. Initially the BMA accused him of sedition and treason but the charges were later withdrawn. (10) However this did not deter Phillip Hoalim and L.B. Banerjee of the Malayan Democratic Union from accusing Goho of

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- (5) G.P. Ramachandra, 'The Indian Independence Movement in Malaya, 1942-1945', M.A. Thesis, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1970, pp. 35-37.
- (6) Tamil Nesan, 7 December 1945.
- (7) Malaya Tribune, 8 August 1947.
- (8) Ramachandra, op.cit., p. 259.
- (9) Tamil Nesan, 10 October 1949.
- (10) Straits Times, 24 March 1946.

having been a Japanese agent from as early as February 1942.⁽¹¹⁾ They cited incidents such as a broadcast he had made from Saigon in 1942 in which he had supported the Japanese war effort, and also an interview which he had had with Premier Tojo in Tokyo the same year.⁽¹²⁾ However there was also evidence that Goho had supported the British in the early months of the war. Indeed he had set up refugee camps and had sent to India for ships to repatriate destitute Indians.⁽¹³⁾ Later he had been drawn into the League by the opportunity it offered to participate in the Indian Independence campaign. Goho, eventually cleared of all charges, was elected to the Singapore Legislative Council in 1948.⁽¹⁴⁾

The British authorities were particularly quick to take action against Indian journalists. In December 1945 there were large scale arrests of those journalists who, it was alleged, had disseminated Japanese propaganda. The detainees included Francis Cooray, editor of the Malay Mail before the war, and editor of the Malai Sinpo, a Japanese sponsored English language paper during the Japanese Occupation.⁽¹⁵⁾ Also arrested were C.V. Kuppusamy, Director of the Indian Press Association in Malaya, V. Saravanamuthu, editor of the Straits Echo, Subramanyam Iyer, editor of the Jananayagam and G. Sarangapany, manager of the Star Press in Singapore and editor of the League's Suraj, all of whom had been forced to publish by the Japanese.⁽¹⁶⁾ More seriously, allegations of treason were brought

(11) M.U. (Secretariat) File 463/46, enclosure, 'Political Criminals of Malaya' by L.M. Banerjee and Phillip Hoalim, 15 September 1945 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(12) Ibid.

(13) S.C. Goho's personal statement to the Indian National Army Historical Committee, n.d. (Netaji Bose Research Bureau, Calcutta).

(14) Malaya Tribune, 26 July 1948.

(15) Ibid., 3 February 1946.

(16) Ibid. See also M.U. (Secretariat) File 349/46, enclosure, 'Political Affairs' (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

against Anwari, a Muslim editor who had assisted the Japanese in the publication of anti-British works.⁽¹⁷⁾ Even after the war he had continued to work for an underground organization spreading anti-British propaganda.⁽¹⁸⁾ It can perhaps be argued that all the arrested journalists, except Anwari, were not particularly anti-British though each had been manipulated by the Japanese.

In the same period several Indian merchants were arrested on charges of 'profiteering', indulging in trade malpractices and giving financial support to the League.⁽¹⁹⁾ For example, a prominent textile merchant, Gian Singh from Kuala Lumpur, was accused of smuggling yen on a large scale into Malaya and British Intelligence described him as being of 'wavering loyalty'.⁽²⁰⁾ A Gujerati textile merchant from Singapore, Maganlal Nagindas, was accused of 'treasonable' involvement with Japanese businessmen in the late 1930s.⁽²¹⁾ As noted in British Intelligence records, the major part of Japanese espionage in Malaya in the period 1933-1941 had been conducted through Japanese private firms.⁽²²⁾ It should be noted however that despite the detaining of many important Indians, the total number of Indians arrested on collaboration charges was only 114, and of these only three were accused of treason.⁽²³⁾

The voluntary or forced withdrawal of a significant proportion

(17) M.U. (Secretariat) File 349/46, enclosure, M.S.S. Penang, 23 March 1946. See also Malayan Press Digest, No. 19, 3 - 9 March 1949 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(18) M.U. (Secretariat) File 349/46, enclosure, M.S.S. Penang, 23 March 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(19) M.U. (Confidential) File 335/46, Vol. I, Intelligence Review, week ending 28 November 1945 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(20) Ibid.

(21) Ibid.

(22) Ibid. See also Yuen Choy Leng, 'Expansion of Japanese Interests in Malaya, 1900-1941', M.A. Thesis, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1973, p. 150.

(23) M.U. (Confidential) File 335/46, Vol. I, Intelligence Review, 29 November 1945 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

of the Indian political élite from local politics in the immediate post-war years, left the Indian masses without effective leadership. In any event, by the end of the war, a majority of the Indian workers had become disillusioned with the League, essentially because the League had failed to prevent Japanese conscription of Indian labour to work on the Thai-Burma railway.⁽²⁴⁾ Inevitably the absence of effective and trusted leadership left the Indian masses vulnerable to manipulation by the Communists and other underground organizations. Therefore the latter years of the Occupation and the immediate postwar period witnessed the growth of Indian underground political organizations seeking to continue the struggle against British imperialism. For example in Singapore in October 1945 a number of ex-League members formed the New Democratic Youth League which sought to spread anti-British propaganda particularly among the Indian troops and discontented Indian youth.⁽²⁵⁾ On 18 December 1945 British Intelligence expressed fears over the continued existence of the Azad Hind Fauj (a remnant of the INA) which continually called on Indian soldiers to 'cease to be tools of the British'.⁽²⁶⁾ The authorities were also concerned over the continual movement of militant League and Indian Congress members between Malaya and India. There was particular concern that Congress agents were being

(24) M.U. (Public Relations Department) File 488/46, enclosure, 'Displaced Person's Movement from Siam-Burma' (N.A. Kuala Lumpur). It was estimated that of the 85,000 Indians who had been conscripted, 46,500 died of starvation and from lack of medical care.

(25) M.U. (Confidential) File 335/46, Vol. I, Intelligence Summary No. 5, 21 November 1945, p. 4 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(26) Ibid., Secret Intelligence Summary, No. 6, 4 December 1945; M.U. (Confidential) File 58/46, enclosure, 'Situation Report of Penang', October 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur); M.U. (Information Department) File 709/46, Intelligence Report, 11 July 1946 from N. Coates of Singapore Press Intelligence to C.F. Sheppard, Malayan Union Press Intelligence, p. 2 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

smuggled into Malaya via Burma and were infiltrating Malayan dock workers.⁽²⁷⁾ Then, in December 1945 K.A. Chandran, head of the New Democratic Youth League was arrested in Singapore on his way to India.⁽²⁸⁾

Extreme subversion was particularly evident among the Indians in Kelantan where Sohan Singh an ex-member of the Ghadr Party and later of the League attempted to mobilize an anti-British resistance movement among the traditionally martial Sikhs and Pathans.⁽²⁹⁾ On 28 October 1946 Mohammed Jangir, a revolutionary from South Thailand and a colleague of Sohan Singh in the League, was arrested for illegal entry into Kelantan.⁽³⁰⁾ These clandestine movements published a number of propaganda works, most notably the Awaz-e-Hind, a Hindi weekly published in Singapore from January 1946 (which also appeared in a Tamil edition as the Indian Murasu) and the Swarajya, an English language pamphlet from Singapore.⁽³¹⁾ In the issue of 4 March 1946, the Swarajya denounced those Indian associations 'which do not represent anybody except those high class and self-seeking Indians who owe blind allegiance to the British Raj and thereby forfeit

(27) M.U. (Confidential) File 335/46, Vol. I, Secret Intelligence Summary, No. 6, 4 December 1945 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(28) Ibid.

(29) M.U. (Confidential) File 58/46, enclosure, 'Situation Report, Kelantan', 9 September 1946, 14 October 1946, 1 November 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(30) M.U. (Confidential) File 335/46, Vol. I, Intelligence Summary, 28 October 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur). During this period British Intelligence was wary of movements between Bangkok and Malaya. The Malayan Security Service feared that Bangkok would become a 'Lisbon of the East' as it was being used as a communicating centre by Asian nationalists and the Russians were planning to set up an embassy there. See Stockwell, op.cit., p. 248, footnote 1.

(31) M.U. (Confidential) File 335/46, enclosures, 'Propaganda of Indian Nationalism', 5 December 1946; Report from Resident Commissioner, Kelantan, to Chief Secretary, Malayan Union, 25 November 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

their rights to represent the Indian community'.⁽³²⁾ The paper also revealed its revolutionary character when it supported the Mutiny of the Royal Indian Navy in Bombay in March 1946.⁽³³⁾ It noted with deep regret 'the failure of the Indian Army to join in and pull the pernicious empire to its knees; yet the abortive revolt was no failure but a warning of things to follow'.⁽³⁴⁾ The fervour of these clandestine organizations was maintained in part by the speculation surrounding the death of Subhas Bose in an aircrash in August 1945. Many Indians believed he had survived and in a mystical manner would return to lead the Independence campaign.⁽³⁵⁾ And it should be noted that these underground organizations in Malaya faded with the attainment of Indian Independence in August 1947.

In 1946, in the midst of this turmoil, Pandit Nehru requested permission to visit the country in order to 'acquaint himself with the conditions of Indian nationals in Malaya'.⁽³⁶⁾ Alexander Newbould, Deputy Chief Civil Affairs Officer, was apprehensive about the visit but felt unable to prohibit it.⁽³⁷⁾ He replied that he had no objection to Nehru's entry 'so long as his mission concerns the relief of distressed persons and is not political'.⁽³⁸⁾ It should however be

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- (32) M.U. (Confidential) File 335/46, enclosure, Report from Resident Commissioner, Kelantan, to Chief Secretary, Malayan Union, 25 November 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).
- (33) M.U. (Confidential) File 335/46, enclosure, Situation Report District Commissioner, No. 652, secret cypher 9606, Part 1 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).
- (34) Ibid.
- (35) M.U. (Confidential) File 63/46, Vol. VI, enclosures, 25 December 1946, 31 January 1947, and letter from Information Headquarters, Malaya Command, G.S. 12th Division to Chief Secretary, Malayan Union (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).
- (36) BMA (Administration) File 4/23, enclosure, Memorandum from BMA Hqrs. Kuala Lumpur to Chief Civil Affairs Officer, Singapore, 21 January 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).
- (37) BMA (Administration) File 8/19, enclosure, 'Indian Affairs correspondence together with reports of Indian communities', 22 January 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).
- (38) Ibid.

pointed out to Nehru that the BMA 'already has the organization for dealing with the distressed of all races in Malaya and that it is expected that Nehru will coordinate his efforts with the BMA'.⁽³⁹⁾

When the Indian leader arrived in March 1946 the Government issued a communique, stating that the 'primary object is for the Pandit to provide psychological relief'⁽⁴⁰⁾ In fact, despite Newbould's fears, Nehru was extremely restrained during his visit, though he was given a rousing reception all over the country by both Indians and non-Indians.⁽⁴¹⁾

At the same time he made subtle attacks on the planters and their exploitation of Indian labour.⁽⁴²⁾ On 22 March 1946 he denounced 'this monopoly concentration, either the plantations should belong to the state or to cooperatives'.⁽⁴³⁾ He also settled a long strike on the Sentul railways in Kuala Lumpur.⁽⁴⁴⁾

Nehru's visit, though arousing tremendous nationalist sentiment, never expressed itself in anti-British propaganda as such, though the District Officer of Kuala Langat reported that the visit had led to the wearing of Gandhi caps among the labourers.⁽⁴⁵⁾ This caused some concern among the planters who regarded the Gandhi cap as a symbol of subversion.⁽⁴⁶⁾

(39) Ibid.

(40) Straits Times, 10 March 1946.

(41) Tamil Nesan, 26 March 1946.

(42) Malaya Tribune, 22 March 1946.

(43) Ibid.

(44) Tamil Nesan, 20 April 1946.

(45) BMA File 79/45, enclosure, District Commissioner I, 27/46, Report of District Officer, Kuala Selangor, 27 March to 28 April 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(46) The Gandhi cap had been associated with 'subversion and rowdyism if not of revolt' during the 1941 strikes in Klang - UPAM Circular No. 11, in 1941, Appendix A, cited in Stenson, op.cit., p. 32.

Malayan Indians were simply reminded by Nehru of India's role in the liberation movements of Asia and reassured, in a somewhat unctuous manner, that 'India could not forget her sons and daughters overseas. Although India could not defend her children overseas today, the time is soon coming when her arms will belong enough to protect them'.⁽⁴⁷⁾ This gave courage to an Indian community grappling with the problems of low wages, disease and an ambivalent political role in Malayan politics. On a more practical level, Nehru set up an Indian Relief Committee to deal with the repatriation of destitutes, and arranged for the despatch of two Medical Missions from India.⁽⁴⁸⁾ Relieved by the outcome, Newbould attributed it to Nehru's 'sensible attitude and popularity with the Indians'.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Even so, the visit had aroused comment amongst the Malays and 'His Excellency might consider it advisable to ask Colonial Office to try and dissuade Indian notables from visiting us at the moment'.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Governor Gent, complacently perceived 'no big issue in this'.⁽⁵¹⁾

(ii)

The visit of Nehru to Malaya in 1946 dramatically emphasized the Indian Nationalist Government's paternal interest in the Malayan Indian community. This interest was usually expressed through the office of the Indian Agent in Malaya, a position established in 1922.⁽⁵²⁾ In the

(47) Malaya Tribune, 19 March 1946.

(48) Tamil Nesan, 29 March 1946, 22 June 1946; M.U. (Public Relations Department) File 230/46, enclosure, Report of 20 June 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(49) BMA (Administration) File 4/23, enclosure, letter from BMA (Malaya) Kuala Lumpur to Chief Civil Affairs Officer, Singapore, 1 April 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(50) Ibid.

(51) BMA (Administration) File 8/19, enclosure, Memo from Governor Gent, 29 April 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(52) Sandhu, op.cit., p. 146.

postwar years the influence of the Agent fluctuated widely, being determined principally by his relationship with British officials and employers in Malaya, his rapport with New Delhi, his links with the local people, and of course, the personality of the Agent himself.

The first Indian Agent after the war was S.K. Chettur. Forty-six years old and a graduate of the Universities of Madras and Oxford, he had joined the Indian Civil Service in 1929, working first as a magistrate in Tanjore, later as a revenue collector, and finally in 1944 as Secretary to the Madras Government.⁽⁵³⁾ For a brief period after the war he had served as a liaison officer at Mountbatten's headquarters. In November 1945 he arrived in Malaya when the country was still in turmoil following the collapse of the Japanese. The first task which confronted him was to deal with the Indians who had 'collaborated' with the Japanese. Here his role was crucial in persuading the British to treat such cases leniently.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Chettur's attention was also directed towards the repatriation of destitute and unemployed Indians and in 1946, a total of 18,000 Indians returned home.⁽⁵⁵⁾ This cost the Government of India £15,000, whilst a further £135,000 was spent on relief programmes on the estates.⁽⁵⁶⁾ Chettur also tackled the question of Malayan citizenship for eligible Indians, essentially by bringing the views of the Indian Associations to the attention of the Governor.⁽⁵⁷⁾

(53) This account of S.K. Chettur is based on information from BMA (Civil Affairs) File 350/45, enclosure, Report of 4 November 1945 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur); Tamil Nesan, 7 November 1945; Malaya Tribune, 4 January 1946.

(54) S.K. Chettur, Malayan Adventure, Mangalore, 1948, p. 32.

(55) Malaya Tribune, 17 January 1947.

(56) Ibid.

(57) Ibid.

However Chettur did alienate certain Indian groups by his frankness and aggressiveness. For example, in February 1946 he reported rather optimistically to India that conditions in Malaya had returned to normal.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Consequently an indignant trade union in Selangor called for his resignation, and in this was supported by all the labour unions in Perak and Selangor and finally taken up in the Straits Echo and certain Indian newspapers.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Chettur also upset the Sikhs by referring to them as 'a large group in Malaya who hold a monopoly of watchmen'.⁽⁶⁰⁾ This drew a quick reprimand from the President of the MIC, Budh Singh, who was himself a Sikh.⁽⁶¹⁾ More predictably Chettur alienated the planters by his criticism of low wages, poor housing, and severe regimentation in the lives of Indian estate workers.⁽⁶²⁾ This dragged him into an argument with the Chairman of UPAM, S.B. Palmer and the Straits Times, which eventually led to his recall to India in May 1947, despite protests from the Malayan Estate Workers Council.⁽⁶³⁾

Chettur was succeeded by John Thivy. Thivy had been the first President of the MIC and unlike all his predecessors as Agent, was a member of the local community. His appointment in July 1947 led to

(58) Ibid., 7 February 1946.

(59) M.U. (Information Department) File 29/46, Malayan Press Digest, No.12, January - February 1946, p. 30 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(60) Malaya Tribune, 8 June 1946.

(61) Tamil Nesan, 9 June 1946.

(62) Straits Times, 30 April 1946.

(63) Malaya Tribune, 1 May 1947, 18 July 1947; Indian Daily Mail, 19 July 1947.

protests from various Indian groups that his occupation of this important post could compromise the position of both the Agent and the MIC.⁽⁶⁴⁾ Later developments confirmed these fears. For example, in December 1948 Thivy persuaded members of the Singapore Regional Indian Congress to contest municipal elections in defiance of a boycott decision by their Executive.⁽⁶⁵⁾ The issue was further complicated by the nomination of Mrs. Thivy to the Elections Committee of the Singapore Regional Indian Congress and eventually a Singapore Congress Executive member, R. Jumabhoy, petitioned the Indian Deputy Foreign Minister, B.R. Keskar, to restrain Thivy from interfering in local politics.⁽⁶⁶⁾ At the same time, John Laycock, a member of the Singapore Legislative Council and a prominent critic of Thivy, lashed out at his 'continuous meddling in the politics of this colony'.⁽⁶⁷⁾

Thivy survived these outbursts, but he soon came up against a much more formidable adversary in the person of the UPAM Chairman, S.B. Palmer. In 1948 the All Malaya Estate Workers Union had pressed for a 100 per cent increase in wages and Palmer responded by threatening to close the estates.⁽⁶⁸⁾ Thivy's reply was that in that event the Indian Government would not hesitate to repatriate all Indian labour from Malaya.⁽⁶⁹⁾ The

(64) Tamil Nesan, 2 August 1947.

(65) Ibid., 22 December 1948.

(66) Straits Times, 22 December 1948; Indian Daily Mail, 25 April 1949.

(67) Jananayagam, 22 December 1948.

(68) Labour Department Monthly Report, June 1948, p. 5 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(69) Tamil Nesan, 10 July 1948.

confrontation between Thivy and the planters finally led to the passing of a Bill in December 1949 abolishing the right of the Indian Agent to investigate places of work and to arbitrate in labour disputes.⁽⁷⁰⁾

The Bill was passed despite the opposition of the Trade Union representative in the Federal Council, M.P. Rajagopal.⁽⁷¹⁾ During the debate over the Bill, the High Commissioner, Henry Gurney argued that 'labour should look to authorities in this country and not outside in matters concerning their welfare'.⁽⁷²⁾ This legislation sparked off such severe criticism from India that within a few months, the Indian Agent's powers and privileges were restored with only slight amendments.⁽⁷³⁾

In this period Thivy also became involved in controversies over the Indian Immigration Fund and Malayan citizenship. With regard to the first Thivy eventually persuaded the employers to refrain from using the Fund for the recruitment of new labour, as they had previously intended, and instead to utilize the Fund to create land settlements for Indian estate labour.⁽⁷⁴⁾ On the second issue, Thivy secured a promise from the authorities that non-citizens would not be prejudiced in terms of promotion or pay.⁽⁷⁵⁾ Thivy's tenure of office coincided with a turbulent period in Malayan history. Unrest was rampant among the labourers, the Indian community was in an ambivalent position, unable to decide whether to return to India or settle permanently in Malaya, and the Emergency had brought in its wake indiscriminate arrests of suspected

(70) Federal Legislative Council Proceedings, 2nd session, March 1949 - 1950, p. 597.

(71) Malaya Tribune, 23 December 1949.

(72) Indian Daily Mail, 26 December 1949.

(73) Ibid., 13 February 1950.

(74) Tamil Nesan, 10 February 1949.

(75) Ibid., 27 April 1949.

Communists. It was therefore inevitable that the Agent would vacillate between being a Consul of a foreign government, and being a friend of the local Indians, forced to intervene in local problems. However after 1950, when the local Indian population was increasingly losing its transitory character, and new channels of communication were being established between the Malayan Government and the people, the Indian Agent gradually became an anachronism. Thivy resigned as Indian Agent in 1950, and was replaced in 1951 by Gopala Menon, who had previously been in the Indian Civil Service.⁽⁷⁶⁾ But by this time the Agent's principal duties were to be feted in public as an envoy of a friendly India, and to issue passports.

(iii)

The strong influence of Indian politics on the Malayan Indian community in the period 1945-1950 can also be seen clearly in the attitudes and policies of the MIC in this period. In these years Nehru and the Indian National Congress maintained a close rapport with the first two Presidents of the MIC, Thivy and Budh Singh.⁽⁷⁷⁾ Indeed prior to 1950 the MIC sent delegations to the Indian National Congress annual sessions in India and also kept the Congress well informed on developments in Malaya.⁽⁷⁸⁾ For example, in December 1946 Thivy impressed upon the

(76) Ibid., 22 March 1951.

(77) Indian Daily Mail, 13 July 1950.

(78) Malaya Tribune, 6 December 1946; Indian Daily Mail, 7 December 1948, 18 January 1949.

Indian Government the need to retain the ban on Indian immigration into Malaya first imposed in 1938.⁽⁷⁹⁾ In this way Thivy foiled an attempt by the MPIEA Secretary, C.D. Ahearne, to secure fresh immigrants from India.⁽⁸⁰⁾

The close links between the MIC and the Indian National Congress caused severe disquiet amongst the other communities in Malaya. For example, at the 1948 annual session of the Indian National Congress, Budh Singh described the Emergency as a 'war of liberation'.⁽⁸¹⁾ This inevitably created a nervous furore in Malaya. Moreover, the previous year the MIC had encountered a bitter response from the UMNO when it had sent a delegation to a Pan-Asian Inter-Relations Conference organized by the Indian National Congress.⁽⁸²⁾ The UMNO had refused to attend the Conference although the Malayan Democratic Union, the Malay Nationalist Party and other Malayan organizations had accepted the invitation.⁽⁸³⁾ As a result, the Majlis, a pro-UMNO Malay paper, questioned whether the MIC should be allowed to participate in Malayan constitutional developments in view of its strong links with foreign nations and foreign leaders.⁽⁸⁴⁾ It further questioned the credentials of the MIC by pointing to the fact that none of the MIC leaders were Malayan citizens.⁽⁸⁵⁾

(79) Malaya Tribune, 6 December 1946.

(80) M.U. (Labour Department) File 230/46, enclosure, Note by Chief Secretary, A.T. Newbould, 13 June 1946; M.U. (Confidential) File 432/46, enclosure, letter from Chief Secretary to Resident Commissioner of Labour, Selangor, 23 May 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(81) Indian Daily Mail, 22 December 1948.

(82) *Ibid.*, 15 January 1948.

(83) *Ibid.*

(84) Majlis, 12 December 1947.

(85) *Ibid.*, 14 December 1947; 19 December 1947.

Attacks such as these were largely responsible for the attempts of the MIC in June 1949 to change its constitution so as to admit only local citizens.⁽⁸⁶⁾ This coincided with a lessening of Indian National Congress influence over the party at the end of the 1940s. This was brought about by a number of factors; first, by an increasing challenge to the MIC leadership from its branches;⁽⁸⁷⁾ second, by the expansion of UMNO and MCA which were coordinating their policies and programmes in preparation for local elections,⁽⁸⁸⁾ and third, from the growing influence of local-born elites in the MIC.⁽⁸⁹⁾ The reorientation of the MIC was also undoubtedly hastened by Nehru's pronouncement in 1950 that 'Indians in Malaya should not look to India for any help; neither is India in a position to render any because she has her own problems to solve and her own population to look after'.⁽⁹⁰⁾ In the same year, Budh Singh was succeeded as President of the MIC by K. Ramanathan Chettiar, a figure unknown in New Delhi.⁽⁹¹⁾

(86) See Chapter VI, pp. 199-201.

(87) Indian Daily Mail, 7 July 1949.

(88) Ibid., 6 June 1949; R.K. Vasil, Politics in a Plural Society: A Study of Non-Communal Political Parties in Malaysia, London, 1971, pp. 10 - 11.

(89) MIC Fourth Annual Session, 29 - 30 April 1950 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(90) Indian Daily Mail, 26 June 1950.

(91) K. Ramanathan Chettiar, born in South India; educated at Madras; lawyer; Income Tax Adviser, Malaya, 1948- ; President, MIC, 1950-1951; Member, Federal Legislative Council, 1954- .

(iv)

As the MIC was heavily influenced by the INC and Nehru in the immediate post-war period it was inevitable that the Muslim section of the Indian community would become increasingly alienated from the MIC and the Hindu Indians in these years.⁽⁹²⁾ A serious split between Hindu and Muslim Indians had in fact begun to emerge in the immediate pre-war period. In the 1920s and 1930s the Indian Muslims in Malaya had in general been politically apathetic, though they had been involved in sporadic political activity, notably the Singapore Mutiny of 1915 and the Khilafat Movement of 1922.⁽⁹³⁾ The Muslims were too divided on ethnic, regional, class and educational lines to mobilize themselves politically in the pre-war years.⁽⁹⁴⁾ Even the rise of the Muslim League in India had had no immediate impact on the Indian community in Malaya.⁽⁹⁵⁾

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- (92) The breakdown of religious groups in the Malayan Indian community was as follows :-

Figures in thousands		
Muslims	-	90.5
Hindus	-	816.1
Christians	-	58.7
Sikhs	-	29.1
Buddhists	-	1.1
Others	-	3.7

Source: del Tufo, op.cit., p. 123.

- (93) Arasaratnam, op.cit., p. 92; Khoo Kay Kim, op.cit., pp. 9-29, 36-39.
- (94) Cf., Khoo Kay Kim, op.cit., p. 40, 'Indians of the merchant class were particularly active in promoting nationalist activities Among members of this group, the Muslims were said to be most active'. It should be noted however that in the pre-war period, Muslims were generally apolitical and only exhibited sporadic political activism. Indeed, Indian political militancy in this period was restricted essentially to labour questions (Stenson, op.cit., pp. 25-37, 49-53) and to radical elite organizations such as the Singapore Indian Association in the early 1920s (N.J. Parmer, Colonial Labour Policy and Administration: A History Of Labour in the Rubber Plantation Industry in Malaya, c. 1910-1941, New York, 1960, p. 65) and the Central Indian Association of Malaya in the late 1930s (Ampalavanar, op.cit., pp. 83-93, 116-118, 307-322; Arasaratnam, op.cit., p. 82-102). These were areas where the Muslims were not involved. This view is supported by CO.273/662, enclosure, Malaya Combined Intelligence Summary, No.6, 1-31 July 1940 (P.R.O. London).
- (95) CO. 273/662, enclosure, Malaya Combined Intelligence Summary, No. 6, 1-31 July 1940 (P.R.O. London).

It was the adoption of the concept of Pakistan by the Muslim League in 1940 that led to the politicization of the Malayan Indian Muslim community.⁽⁹⁶⁾ The resulting split between Muslims and Hindus was exacerbated by the fact that Subhas Bose of the Indian Independence League, strongly opposed the concept of Pakistan.⁽⁹⁷⁾ Bose's attitude towards Pakistan became even more inflexible towards the end of the war when a number of Congress leaders, sensitive to the increasing militancy of the Pakistan movement, decided to compromise with it.⁽⁹⁸⁾ In response, Bose ordered all broadcasting stations to mount a campaign against this 'appeasement'.⁽⁹⁹⁾ Hindu-Muslim relations suffered a further setback when the League attempted to suppress all Muslim associations in Malaya. Most notably in 1942 the League attempted to shut the All India Muslim Club of Singapore, despite severe opposition from the Singapore Muslims.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ In retaliation K.S. Anwari, President of the Club, demanded fifty per cent Muslim representation on all League Councils which clearly could not be conceded.⁽¹⁰¹⁾ The Muslim Club of Singapore was eventually closed by the Japanese who detected in its pro-Muslim League sympathies an element of pro-British loyalty.⁽¹⁰²⁾

(96) BMA (Publicity and Propaganda) File 412/45, enclosure, Intelligence Report, 26 February 1945 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(97) M.K. Durrani, The Sixth Column, London, 1955, pp. 82-83.

(98) M. Sivaram, The Road to Delhi, Tokyo, 1966, p. 213.

(99) J.A. Thivy, A Short History of the Indian Independence Movement, Hanoi, 1945 (mimeograph copy, Thivy Papers, University of Malaya Library, Kuala Lumpur) pp. 33-35.

(100) Ramachandra, *op.cit.*, p. 91.

(101) Ibid.

(102) Syonan Shimbun, 22 July 1942, 23 July 1942.

Henceforth the attitude of Muslims to the Indian Independence League was either one of indifference or concealed hostility, the latter becoming increasingly evident when rich Muslim merchants were forced to contribute to the coffers of the League. Shortly after the Occupation, Muslim groups led by the Penang Muslim League complained to India of ill-treatment by Hindu groups in the Indian National Army.⁽¹⁰³⁾ However enquiries by a Select Committee under Deputy Foreign Minister B.R. Keskar were unable to uncover evidence of communal discrimination by the Indian National Army or League officials.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾

It was inevitable that the polarization between Hindu and Muslim Indians in Malaya would reach its peak between late 1945 and August 1947 when the debate over Pakistan and the Partition of India was at its height. Strong support for the Pakistan movement came from the highly nationalist Muslim press in both Malaya and Singapore. The Malaya Nanban (Malayan Friend) published in Singapore was in the forefront of the campaign for Partition.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ Its editor, Karim Ghani, had a history of rather changing not to say contradictory political stances. During the war he had supported Bose and was even a member of Bose's Cabinet.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾

(103) BMA File 432/45, enclosure, Report from Kedah and Perlis, December 1945; M.U. (Secretariat) File 56/46, Vol. I (N.A. Kuala Lumpur); Dhesa Nesan, 10 April 1946.

(104) Sevika, 15 May 1946.

(105) The Malayan Nanban was first published in September 1941 and was edited by N.P. Shaik Abdul Kader, a Tamil chauvinist who expressed the policy of promoting 'the interest of Tamil speaking population of Malaya'. He was succeeded by Karim Ghani who was pro-Muslim League and anti-Congress. Public Relations Department (Confidential) File 90/40, item 18, Report of 13 September 1948 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(106) C. Gamba, The Origins of Trade Unionism in Malaya: A Study in Colonial Labour Unrest, Singapore, 1962, pp. 503-504. Karim Ghani was born in India in 1908. Before the war he published a Tamil daily in Rangoon. He was also Parliamentary Secretary in Ba Maw's Cabinet. During the Occupation he was a Minister in Bose's Cabinet. On the return of the British he was arrested and later released. He became editor of the Malaya Nanban, and was also President of the Singapore Muslim League. After a dispute with the directors of the Malaya Nanban, he resigned and started a Tamil weekly paper, the Udaya Soorayan in Singapore which failed. He next moved to Penang where he published the Malay weekly, Suloh Kemajuan. In Penang he moved into Malay society, being friendly with UMNO officials and was active in proselytizing Islam through his Party Islam Malaya.

After the war he became staunchly pro-Muslim League and pro-British.

In December 1946, he cabled the Colonial Office:

Having the experience of the rule of the Azad Hind Government and knowing the great hardships we Muslims have undergone, we do not desire a Constituent Assembly in the coming government of Free India. We support wholeheartedly the Pakistan demand under the leadership of Ali Jinnah, leader of All-India Muslim League.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾

But with the establishment of a separate Pakistan, he then offered his favours to the Malays. He was a close friend of the radical Dr. Burhanuddin of the Malay Nationalist Party as well as more conservative UMNO leaders.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ In 1948 he was the founder President of the Party Islam Malaya in Penang.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ But in this period he was viewed with suspicion by the British who were wary of his publication, the Malay weekly Suloh Kemajuan (Torch of Progress).⁽¹¹⁰⁾ During the Maria Hertogh riots of December 1950 he was implicated in the murder of a British subject, Peter Bell, and was banished to Pakistan following

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- (107) Public Relations Department (Confidential) File 488/48, enclosure, Confidential note from Penang and Province Wellesley Public Relations Officer to Director of Public Relations, Federation of Malaya, 28 June 1948 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).
- (108) Public Relations Department File 533/46, enclosure, Directive Intelligence Report, 20 January 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur); Malaya Nanban, 28 August 1946.
- (109) Public Relations Department (Confidential) File 488/48, enclosure, Confidential note from Public Relations Officer, Penang and Province Wellesley to Director of Public Relations, Federation of Malaya, 28 June 1948 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur). There is no evidence to suggest that the Party Islam Malaya was a predecessor of the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party of Dr. Burhanuddin. The latter party grew out of the Malayan Muslim Party formed in Perak in 1948.
- (110) Ibid.

conviction.⁽¹¹¹⁾ It was the end of the colourful career of a maverick and opportunist politician.

The Zindabad, a Tamil weekly from Penang echoed the pro-Pakistan sentiments of Karim Ghani's Malaya Nanban and condemned those Muslims supporting the Indian National Congress.⁽¹¹²⁾ The Dhesa Nesan, a daily paper from Penang was also a vehement critic of the Congress Party and collected funds for Pakistan and Jinnah.⁽¹¹³⁾ This incessant press propaganda produced further strains in the relations between the Hindus and the Muslims, and in April and June 1946 led to open rioting when Hindus attacked Muslim shops in Singapore.⁽¹¹⁴⁾ The June riots resulted in the death of two and the arrest of forty-four on charges of illegal possession of arms.⁽¹¹⁵⁾ Rather surprisingly, the Colonial Secretary, G.H. Hall, saw no connection between these disturbances in Singapore and events in India but ascribed them to feuds between local political groups.⁽¹¹⁶⁾ But Captain L. Gammans, a Conservative Member for Parliament who was in Malaya, saw clearly that these disturbances

(111) Report of the Singapore Riots Inquiry Commission 1951 together with a despatch from the Governor of Singapore to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Singapore, 1951; Malaya Tribune, 14 December 1950; Indian Daily Mail, 18 December 1950; Straits Times, 5 January 1951, 6 January 1951, 20 January 1951, 5 February 1951, 30 June 1953. This was an anti-European protest caused by a dispute over the marriage of Maria Hertogh, a Dutch girl left in the care of a Malay family during the war. In 1950 her Dutch mother reclaimed her and in the midst of this controversy, she was placed in the custody of a Catholic Convent in Singapore. This was considered to be an anti-Islamic act and Muslims in Singapore rioted.

(112) Zindabad, 24 March 1946; 7 April 1946.

(113) Dhesa Nesan, 20 March 1946, 23 March 1946, 26 March 1946, 4 April 1946. The Dhesa Nesan was started in 1925 but was forced to suspend publication during the Japanese Occupation. In August 1945 it resumed publication in Penang and had a circulation of 3,000. Public Relations Department File 412/45, item 18, 'Malayan Newspapers Data' (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(114) Indian Daily Mail, 26 June 1946.

(115) Malaya Tribune, 28 June 1946.

(116) Ibid.

were a reflection of events in the sub-continent.⁽¹¹⁷⁾ When, in August 1946 an Interim Congress Government was formed in India, the event was celebrated by the Hindus in Malaya and mourned by the Muslims.⁽¹¹⁸⁾ There is little doubt that these conflicting sentiments were the cause of a fresh outbreak of disturbances on 2 September when Muslims from the Geylang area in Singapore attacked Hindu shopkeepers in nearby Serangoon road.⁽¹¹⁹⁾ Faced with these disturbances, the British authorities felt it necessary to impose stricter censorship on publications coming into Malaya both from India and from the extremist Islamic Information Bureau in London.⁽¹²⁰⁾

The most prominent pro-Jinnah organization in Malaya was the Muslim League of Penang. It campaigned vigorously against the Cripps Mission to India in early 1946 and condemned without reservation British plans for a Federal India.⁽¹²¹⁾ This led the Penang League into a bitter feud with the Penang Hindu Sabha and the Hindu-controlled Sevika and Samarasan.⁽¹²²⁾ In December 1946, the Penang Muslim League, with other pro-Jinnah factions, joined with Malay organizations such as the Saberkas and the

(117) Ibid.

(118) Ibid., 5 September 1946.

(119) Ibid., 3 September 1946.

(120) M.U. (Confidential) File 364/46, enclosure, Press and Printing censorship of incoming publications, 21 March 1946 - 18 April 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(121) Dhesa Nesan, 21 March 1946.

(122) BMA (Press Intelligence, Publicity and Printing Department) File 42/45, enclosure, Malayan Press Digest, No. 18, October - November 1945, January - December 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur); Dhesa Nesan, 18 May 1946. The Sevika was started in Penang in November 1945, its editors being T. Sethuraman and S. Athinappan. The paper was extremist and was essentially pro-Subhas Bose. It had a circulation of 2,000. The Samarasan first appeared on 25 February 1946. It was edited by T. Kanagasundaram and was essentially concerned with social reform.

Singapore Malay Union, to form the All Malaya Muslim League, which pledged support for Jinnah and Pakistan.⁽¹²³⁾

However, when Partition was finally achieved in August 1947, the Indian Muslims in Malaya were faced with a serious and perhaps unexpected problem, as indeed were their co-religionists in the sub-continent. Many Muslims had supported the Pakistan movement without seriously considering whether they really wished to owe their allegiance to a separate Muslim state. The problem was particularly acute for those Muslims who had come from what was now Independent India. One immediate consequence of Partition therefore was the splitting of the Muslim community in Malaya into Pakistan and Indian factions. This was reflected most notably in the development of Pakistan Muslim Associations and Indian Muslim Associations and in a rift in the Muslim merchant community.⁽¹²⁴⁾ For example, Muslim members of the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce divided into a pro-Indian National Congress group led by R. Jumabhoy and a pro-Pakistan faction led by M.J. Namazie.⁽¹²⁵⁾ In December 1947, when the turmoil within the Muslim community was most pronounced, Thivy, the Indian Agent, argued strongly that Indians should not fly the Pakistan flag.⁽¹²⁶⁾ He stressed that 'those who want to claim allegiance to Pakistan are welcome to do so provided they renounce all privileges and rights accorded them by the Indian Government'.⁽¹²⁷⁾

(123) Indian Daily Mail, 2 December 1946.

(124) See Registrar of Societies Files:- 357/62 - 'Malayan Pakistan Association'; 304/59 - Malayan Pakistan League Selangor; 396/59 - Federation of Malaya Pakistan Youth Association; 1031/50 - Federation Uttar Pradesh Muslim Association; 207/50 - Selangor Pakistan Association (Registry of Societies, Kuala Lumpur).
Indian Daily Mail, 2 May 1949.

(125) Indian Daily Mail, 2 May 1949.

(126) Malaya Tribune, 18 December 1947.

(127) Ibid.

The confusion within the Muslim community which followed Partition prompted many of its members to seek affiliations with local parties other than the MIC. Thus a number of Muslims from Penang applied for membership of the local UMNO branch, while others became involved with non-communal political parties such as the Malayan Labour Party.⁽¹²⁸⁾ Similarly in Singapore many Indian Muslims joined either non-communal organizations or Arab and Malay parties.⁽¹²⁹⁾ On the East Coast, where the Muslims, largely Pathans, had married into the local population older members of the community supported the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party, whilst the younger, local-born Pathan Muslims with Malay mothers were attracted into the UMNO.⁽¹³⁰⁾ It was only in Perak and Selangor that the MIC was able to attract Muslims in substantial numbers.⁽¹³¹⁾

The most natural candidate for Indian Muslim allegiance was perhaps the UMNO. This was seen most clearly in Penang where from 1947 the local Muslim League almost constantly aligned itself with the Malay party.⁽¹³²⁾ The Penang Muslim League supported the Malays in rejecting the Malayan Union proposals and in boycotting the hartal in August 1947.⁽¹³³⁾ Indeed it was largely due to the League's efforts that the hartal in Penang was a purely Chinese affair.⁽¹³⁴⁾ However from December 1948 the Penang

(128) Tamil Nesan, 31 May 1949.

(129) Indian Daily Mail, 7 April 1949.

(130) Sayed Mohammed bin Sayed Ahmad, 'Orang Pathan Di Kelantan', Academic Exercise, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1973, pp. 98-100.

(131) Report of the Hon. General Secretary of the MIC presented at the Eighth Annual Session at Prai, 16-17 April 1954 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(132) Malaya Tribune, 24 October 1947.

(133) See Chapter IV, pp. 107-108, 124.

(134) Ibid.

Secession Movement caused a temporary split within the Penang Muslim League and this in turn caused a brief rift between the League and the UMNO.⁽¹³⁵⁾ Influential merchants in the League, including its nominee to the Settlement Council, S.M. Abu Bakar, joined the Penang Chamber of Commerce and the Straits Chinese British Association in supporting secession as being necessary to protect Penang's free port status.⁽¹³⁶⁾ But while the mercantile interests who dominated the League saw advantages in secession, pressure from the All Malaya Muslim League, which was opposed to secession, was hard to resist, and this left Bakar exposed.⁽¹³⁷⁾ However by February 1949 the secession movement had lost its vigour, largely because Penang's free port status had been ensured, but also because the authorities had assured local residents of special consideration over citizenship.⁽¹³⁸⁾

The Penang Muslim League's close liaison with the local UMNO became an electoral partnership during the municipal elections of 1951 and 1952. The UMNO relied on the League to attract Indian voters and thereby defeat the Indian candidates of the Penang Labour Party. Under this arrangement in December 1951, Abu Bakar was nominated as UMNO/Muslim League candidate for Tanjong ward.⁽¹³⁹⁾ However in June 1954 Abu Bakar refused to conform to UMNO policy of boycotting all councils, a measure taken to force the British to bring forward Federal

(135) Straits Echo, 21 December 1948.

(136) M.N. Sopiee, From Malayan Union to Singapore Separation: Political Unification in the Malaysia Region, 1945-1965, Kuala Lumpur, 1974, pp. 56-57.

(137) Straits Times, 3 January 1949.

(138) Sopiee, op.cit., pp. 67-69.

(139) G. Hawkins, Report on Introduction of Elections in Municipality of Georgetown, Penang, 1951, Kuala Lumpur, 1953, Appendix A, pp. 20-21. Tyeb Khan and Abu Bakar were Muslim League/UMNO Municipal Councillors.

elections to 1954.⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ Abu Bakar's contention was that 'the municipal council is a civic body not political, its sole aim is to look after rate payers'.⁽¹⁴¹⁾ In protest against the UMNO, Bakar revived the League as a purely political party in order to contest separately the elections in November 1954.⁽¹⁴²⁾ During the campaign Bakar was constantly drawn into political conflicts with the Party Negara candidate, Abdul Wahab, which reflected the severe competition between the Muslim League, the Party Negara and the UMNO for the Indian Muslim vote on the island.⁽¹⁴³⁾ Indeed, the Indian Muslims were crucial for a victory of the Malay political parties in the otherwise Chinese-dominated electorate of Penang. In December 1954 there was a scuffle between Bakar and the Party Negara candidate and this led to a riot involving one thousand angry UMNO supporters who stormed Penang Street leaving six injured.⁽¹⁴⁴⁾

The persistent identity of the All Malaya Muslim League with the UMNO, led to the League requesting in October 1956, that the Alliance accept it as an equal partner.⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ The League, representing 100,000 Indian Muslims, emphasized its political role in supporting the Alliance's independence campaign.⁽¹⁴⁶⁾ In late 1957 the UMNO Executive Committee

(140) Straits Times, 22 June 1954; Tamil Nesan, 22 June 1954.

(141) Straits Times, 22 June 1954.

(142) Registrar of Societies File 387/54, enclosure, letter from J.B. Prentiss, Registrar of Societies, Federation of Malaya, 23 August 1954 (Registry of Societies, Kuala Lumpur).

(143) Registrar of Societies File 387/54, enclosure, letter from Registrar of Societies Penang, 22 October 1954 (Registry of Societies, Kuala Lumpur).

(144) Straits Times, 6 December 1954.

(145) Straits Times, 29 October 1956.

(146) Ibid., 20 December 1956.

decided to delay a decision on the Muslim League request, pending amendments to the constitutions of both parties.⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ The UMNO was particularly concerned about the presence of non-Federal citizens in the League and hence insisted that the party's constitution be amended so as to admit only Federal citizens.⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ The League was finally admitted into the UMNO in 1958 but only as an affiliate, not an equal partner.⁽¹⁴⁹⁾ Many members of the All Malaya Muslim League were later able to pass directly into the UMNO fold because of their mixed racial origins. Those who lacked this entrée into the UMNO joined the MIC.⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ In the end, race rather than religion determined their allegiance.

An interesting feature of the politics of the Indian Muslims in Singapore in this period was their tendency to form political alignments with their co-religionists, the Arabs and the Malays, in order to survive in a Chinese dominated electorate. For example, in June 1947 the Singapore Malay Union, the Singapore Arab Union and the Singapore Muslim League, the latter led by Karim Ghani, attempted to form a single political party to organize the electorate for the 1948 municipal elections.⁽¹⁵¹⁾ However in the fragmented political atmosphere of Singapore a purely religious identity could not suffice. From 1948 there was increasing Indian Muslim support for the cosmopolitan Progressive

(147) Ibid., 19 August 1957.

(148) Ibid.

(149) Singapore Tiger Standard, 19 August 1958, 9 May 1959; Straits Times, 4 August 1958; Tamil Nesan, 19 August 1958.

(150) Tamil Nesan, 19 August 1958; Annual Report and Statement of Accounts of the MIC, 1957-1958, presented at the 12th Annual General Meeting, 18 May 1958, pp. 1-2 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(151) Straits Times, 31 December 1947; Indian Daily Mail, 2 June 1947.

Party and the radical Labour Party, whilst religious-based political parties faded.⁽¹⁵²⁾

(v)

If the period 1945-1950 had seen the Malayan Indian community most strongly influenced by the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League of India, then the period after 1950 witnessed the growing influence of Tamil Nationalism and the Dravidian politics of Madras over the Malayan Indians. This reflected in part the emergence of vigorous Tamil separatism in India itself, as well as of course the Tamil numerical domination of the Malayan Indians.⁽¹⁵³⁾ It is possible to identify two main strands of Dravidian nationalist ideology in this period. Perhaps the most prominent was the militant, extreme, Dravida Kalagam, or Black Shirts movement, led by E.V. Ramasamy Naicker. This was reflected in Malaya, principally in the Pan-Malayan Dravidian Federation (PMDF) established in 1932.

In the post-war period the PMDF worked closely with the PMFTU in Selangor, Perak and Johore.⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ Indeed the Secretary of the PMDF, S. Angamuthu, was a close associate of S. Mohan of the PMFTU who was

(152) Indian Daily Mail, 22 December 1951; Yeo Kim Wah, Political Development in Singapore, 1945-1955, Singapore, 1973, pp. 73, 99, 101, 103, 120, 226, 266.

(153) Sandhu, op.cit., p. 237, Table 13.

(154) M.U. (Secretariat) File 27/46, Report from P.J. Howes, OCPD Klang to Officer in charge, M.S.S., 13 October 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur); UPAM Circular, No. 10, October 1946 (R.G.A. Kuala Lumpur).

later involved in the MCP.⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ The objective of the PMFTU was to exploit the class, caste and ethnic divisions between the Indian labourers and the Indian elite in order to undermine the MIC.⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ It is interesting to note that this link between the PMDF and the MCP was reflected in Madras where the Dravida Kalagam often supported Communist candidates in opposition to the Indian National Congress.⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ The close association of the PMDF with left-wing organizations, notably the MCP and the PMFTU, ensured that throughout this period it was deeply involved in labour unrest.⁽¹⁵⁸⁾

The PMDF tended to be most active following visits to Malaya by E.V. Ramasamy Naicker, or other prominent Dravidian nationalists. For example, when Naicker visited the country in February 1948 there was a marked upsurge in Tamil chauvinism and labour militancy.⁽¹⁵⁹⁾ During a further visit in December 1954, his statements proved so extreme that the Federation Government refused to extend his visa.⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ In addition the weekly paper of the PMDF, the Dravida Murasu was banned.⁽¹⁶¹⁾ Henceforth the Special Branch in both Malaya and Singapore maintained a

(155) Commissioner for Labour, Malayan Union, File 237/47, enclosure, Pan Malayan Dravidian Federation Conference Report 14 - 16 April 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(156) Stenson, op.cit., pp. 122-124.

(157) C.J. Baker, The Politics of South India, 1920-1937, Cambridge, 1976, p. 193.

(158) UPAM Circular No.2, February 1951 (R.G.A. Kuala Lumpur); Commissioner for Labour Malayan Union, File 237/47, enclosure, 15 March 1947; Commissioner for Labour, Federation of Malaya, File 20/48, enclosure, Monthly Report for February 1948, p. 7 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur); UPAM minutes of meeting of 1 October 1956 (R.G.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(159) Tamil Nesan, 12 February 1948.

(160) Indian Daily Mail, 22 December 1954, 23 December 1954.

(161) Singapore Tiger Standard, 30 September 1956.

close watch on all visiting Dravidian nationalists.⁽¹⁶²⁾ It was also in this period that the PMDF attempted to subvert the sub-elites of the NUPW in order to challenge the top leadership of the Union which was predominantly non-Tamil.⁽¹⁶³⁾

The second strand of Dravidian nationalism emphasized socio-economic reform and moderate political change. It found root among Tamil journalists, businessmen, school-teachers and relatively high caste labourers, who had been alienated from the militant PMDF on the estates. Their principal organizations included the Tamil Reform Association of Malaya and Singapore, the Tamils Representative Council and the Tamil Pannai. The Tamil Reform Association, which had been established in 1932, was mainly involved in social and religious reform.⁽¹⁶⁴⁾ For example, it campaigned against such practices as the carrying of kavadi, fire-walking and the worshipping of idols. It had no qualms in resorting to legislation to eradicate such practices, though it encountered strong opposition from bodies such as the Brahmin-dominated Singapore Hindu Association and the militant Penang Hindu Sabha who were loathe to permit British legislators to interfere in strictly Hindu traditions.⁽¹⁶⁵⁾

In the early 1950s the Tamil Reform Association promoted the ponggol (or harvest festival) as a festival to mark Tamil unity.⁽¹⁶⁶⁾

(162) Straits Times, 29 June 1959.

(163) The top officials in the NUPW were two Malayalees, P.P. Narayanan and C.P.R. Menon, and a Bengali K.R. Choudhury, Indian Daily Mail, 1 October 1956, 14 June 1968.

(164) Arasaratnam, op.cit., pp. 172-174.

(165) Straits Times, 10 June 1949.

(166) Indian Daily Mail, 10 November 1951, 3 January 1956.

This was intended to replace Deepavali (the festival of lights), which was symbolic of North Indian domination of South India in historical times. Moreover, annual conferences were held to discuss issues relating to Tamil society, and literary circles organized to popularize Tamil works such as the Tirukkural, and the works of Bharathi Dasan, a Tamil nationalist poet and playwright.⁽¹⁶⁷⁾ In 1951 the Tamil Reform Association canvassed support for the establishment of a department of Tamil Studies in the University of Malaya and in this it was supported by the Carr-Saunders Commission.⁽¹⁶⁸⁾

Throughout this period the Tamils doubted whether the MIC represented Tamil interests. These suspicions were expressed by the Tamil Murasu, the paper of the Singapore Tamil Reform Association, as early as 1947.⁽¹⁶⁹⁾ Then from December 1948, the Tamil Reform Association agitated for separate political representation.⁽¹⁷⁰⁾ In January 1949, with growing exasperation, Thivy attacked this growing Tamil parochialism as expressed in the press and the proliferation of Tamil organizations.⁽¹⁷¹⁾ In the 1950s certain MIC branches, most notably in Penang and Kuala Selangor, were dominated by Tamils at the lower leadership levels and this frequently led to friction between these branches and the MIC leadership.⁽¹⁷²⁾ For example, in October 1953

(167) See Minutes of Tamil Reform Association, 1948-1959 (Singapore Tamil Reform Association Hqrs., Singapore).

(168) S. Arasaratnam, 'Indian Studies in the University', Tamil Oli, Tamil Language Society, University of Malaya, 1966-1967, p. 135; Carr-Saunders, Report of the Commission on University Education in Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 25 February 1948, p. 43; Indian Daily Mail, 28 April 1951.

(169) Tamil Murasu, 25 January 1947.

(170) Indian Daily Mail, 22 December 1948.

(171) Malaya Tribune, 25 January 1949.

(172) MIC Annual Report presented at the 7th Annual Session, Ipoh, 9 - 10 May 1953, pp. 2-4 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

the Tamils Representative Council in Singapore passed a motion of no confidence in the Singapore Regional Indian Congress, on the grounds that the latter had defied the policy of the MIC leadership with regard to the boycott of elections.⁽¹⁷³⁾ Tamil disenchantment with the MIC increased with the latter's advocacy of a national education system which ignored Tamil and emphasized English or Malay as the medium of instruction.⁽¹⁷⁴⁾

However, the most serious conflict between the Tamils and the MIC occurred in 1954-1955. In this period the MIC leadership was eager to join the Alliance but the Tamil community was prepared to support this only if it could secure changes in Alliance policy, particularly on education. The Tamil Murasu and the Indian Daily Mail were particularly critical of the Alliance, dismissing the UMNO-MCA merger as 'unholy and ill-conceived'.⁽¹⁷⁵⁾ In March 1955 Tan Siew Sin, the MCA Publicity Officer, wrote to the Singapore Tiger Standard complaining that the paper was pro-Tamil and anti-Chinese.⁽¹⁷⁶⁾ The Tamils then suspected, with no evidence, that there had been collusion between the MIC and the MCA to prejudice the latter against them.⁽¹⁷⁷⁾

This unleashed a wave of criticism of the MIC by Tamil organizations throughout the country. In March 1955 there were emotional outbursts

(173) Indian Daily Mail, 6 October 1953.

(174) Ibid., 10 October 1953.

(175) Ibid., 14 July 1955.

(176) Singapore Tiger Standard, 6 March 1955; Tamil Nesan, 7 March 1955.

(177) Tamil Murasu, 10 March 1955, 12 March 1955; Straits Times, 23 March 1955; Tamil Nesan, 24 March 1955; Sevika, 26 March 1955.

in the Tamil Murasu advising the Tamils to boycott the MIC.⁽¹⁷⁸⁾
 K.L. Devaser, President of the MIC, hit back at this Tamil emotionalism and to the chagrin of the Tamils refrained from defending them from the accusations of the MCA.⁽¹⁷⁹⁾ This later led to Devaser's defeat at the MIC Presidential elections in May 1955, by V.T. Sambanthan, a comparatively unknown Tamil graduate of Annamalai University.⁽¹⁸⁰⁾
 But this did not halt Tamil obduracy. In September the same year the Tamils Representative Council asked that Tamil be regarded as another official language alongside English and Malay, and also demanded two more Tamil representatives on the Education Select Committee of Malaya.⁽¹⁸¹⁾
 Here they were supported by the Penang MIC, a Tamil dominated branch.⁽¹⁸²⁾

Crucial in the promotion of Tamil chauvinism was the Tamil Press, for in the period 1945-1957 it was more vocal and often more militant than the Malayalam and Punjabi press. The major Tamil paper was the Tamil Murasu, published in Singapore from 1934. In the post-war period it was edited by G. Sarangapany, who though a follower of the Indian National Congress, was a moderate Tamil Nationalist.⁽¹⁸³⁾ The Tamil Murasu had a circulation of 22,000 in 1957.⁽¹⁸⁴⁾ The major Tamil paper

(178) Tamil Murasu, 10 March 1955, 12 March 1955.

(179) Tamil Nesan, 28 March 1955; Straits Times, 28 March 1955.

(180) Tamil Nesan, 2 May 1955.

(181) Indian Daily Mail, 28 September 1955.

(182) Ibid., 27 April 1956.

(183) BMA (Public Relations Department) File 90/48, enclosure, Malayan Press Digest, No.12, p. 37 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(184) Tamil Murasu, 1 December 1957.

in the Federation was the Tamil Nesan, controlled by Chettiars and high caste Tamils.⁽¹⁸⁵⁾ It was established in 1924 by Brahmins and frequently had Brahmin editorial staff.⁽¹⁸⁶⁾ The Tamil Nesan supported the moderate faction of the Indian National Congress, particularly S. Kamraj, the South Indian Congress leader.⁽¹⁸⁷⁾ It was also a strong supporter of the Tamil elite in the MIC, and had a close relationship with K. Ramanathan Chettiar, President of the MIC, 1950-1951.⁽¹⁸⁸⁾ It had a circulation of only 5,000 in 1946 but this rose to 25,000 by 1957.⁽¹⁸⁹⁾

A third Tamil paper, the militant Jananayagam, was sponsored by the MCP.⁽¹⁹⁰⁾ An edition published in Singapore, the Munnani, was intensely anti-British.⁽¹⁹¹⁾ It was edited by Ganapathy, the MCP cadre who was hanged in 1949. Finally, the Tamil literary revival in this period produced a number of Tamil newspapers concerned solely with disseminating Tamil literature and culture. Here the Tamil Chudar with a circulation of 2,000 and the Tamil Kody with a circulation of 1,000 were prominent.⁽¹⁹²⁾ The editor of the latter, O.A.R. Arunasalam Chettiar, was active in the TamilPannai.

(185) BMA (Public Relations Department) File 90/48, enclosure, Malayan Press Digest, No. 12, p. 37 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(186) Ampalavanar, op.cit., pp. 108-118.

(187) Ibid.

(188) The Tamil Nesan's editor S. Athinahappan was President of the Selangor Regional Indian Congress in December 1949.

(189) Tamil Nesan, 1 December 1957.

(190) BMA (Public Relations Department) File 90/48, enclosure, Malayan Press Digest, No. 12, p. 37 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(191) BMA (Publicity and Propaganda) File 412/45; Public Relations Department, File 95/48, enclosure, List of Newspapers in the Malay Peninsula (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(192) Public Relations Department, File 95/48, enclosure, List of Newspapers in the Malay Peninsula (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

Therefore increasing Tamil chauvinism from the late 1940s manifested itself in many areas - in religious reform, in a literary revival, in trade union organization, and in language and educational issues as well as in politics. Paradoxically it achieved relatively little. How can this paradox be explained? Compared with other Indian groups, the Tamil community had a relatively small educated elite. This had a number of consequences. First, the Tamil elite found itself submerged by the MIC leaders and it is noteworthy that three of the most active Tamil politicians, G. Sarangapany, S. Govindaraj and A. Balakrishnan never acquired more than regional importance in the MIC organization.⁽¹⁹³⁾ Second, while it was possible to mobilize a huge Tamil work force, it was impossible to provide a sustained Tamil leadership. It is significant that the arrest of the Tamil labour militants, A.M. Samy and I. Manivelu in 1947 was sufficient to defuse labour militancy in Kedah in the immediate post-war period.⁽¹⁹⁴⁾ Similarly, labour unrest in 1954-1956 died away sharply following the arrest of a few Tamil leaders.⁽¹⁹⁵⁾ Finally with so many issues facing

(193) G. Sarangapany, Executive Committee Member of Singapore Regional Indian Congress, MIC Working Committee Member, 1947-1950, Chairman, All Malaya Tamil Reform Association and Tamils Representative Council; editor of Tamil Murasu and Indian Daily Mail.

S. Govindaraj, General Secretary of the MIC, 1949-1952.

A. Balakrishnan, President, Penang Regional Indian Congress, 1951, 1954-1955.

(194) See Chapter 111, pp. 79-80.

(195) See Chapter 111, pp. 93-94.

the community and so few leaders, the potential energies of the Tamil population were inevitably diffused, rather than channelled towards just one or two issues. Another factor was the strain of over-emotionalism in Tamil society. Political activism among the Tamils was characterized by sudden, violent outbursts, rather than sustained campaigns. The furore over the MCA episode in March 1955, noted earlier, is a good example of this. In short, though the Tamils had the numerical strength to dominate Malayan Indian society and were certainly capable of creating considerable political commotion and noise, in the last analysis they failed to achieve pre-eminence over the other Indian groups in Malaya.

. III

INDIAN LABOUR 1945-57

(i)

The one area of Indian and indeed Malayan political life where the Tamils could make a considerable impact was, of course, in industrial relations, for a major proportion of the labour force on the rubber estates, the docks and the railways, was Tamil.⁽¹⁾ It was essentially for this reason that the Tamils were heavily involved in the widespread labour unrest and trade union militancy which swept through Malaya in the years 1945 to the declaration of the Emergency in June 1948.

In the immediate postwar period, unstable economic and political conditions caused great hardship to the workers in Malaya. High unemployment, rapid inflation and shortages of essential foodstuffs such as rice, were the most conspicuous signs of economic dislocation.⁽²⁾ Under these conditions the propaganda of the MCP was understandably effective and the Party provided the leadership for hunger marches, for demonstrations against unemployment and in the organization of trade unions.⁽³⁾ In Singapore the first signs of labour unrest

(1) Del Tufo, Report on the 1947 Census, pp. 78-79, 113-114. See also Arasaratnam, Indians in Malaysia and Singapore, p. 125.

(2) M.U. File 465/46, 'Confidential memo on the present high cost of living', submitted by MSS, 9 January 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur). An Interim Report on prices and wages published in 1946 stated that while the monthly expenditure of the average Indian labourer in Penang was only \$7.11 in December 1939, it had increased to \$59.05 in October 1945, an increase of more than eight times. The British Military Administration had granted wage increases of 21-31 per cent but this was clearly inadequate. C. Gamba, The Origins of Trade Unionism in Malaya, p. 40.

(3) BMA File 4521/46, 25th Indian Division Weekly Intelligence Review, week ending 28 November 1945, p.6 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

surfaced as early as October 1945 when 7,000 dockworkers at Tanjong Pagar went on strike.⁽⁴⁾ Here the Straits Times noted the presence of a large number of agitators though it was clear that real issues were involved.⁽⁵⁾ The British Military Administration reacted by arresting ten trade union leaders and using British troops and Japanese prisoners-of-war to work on the docks.⁽⁶⁾

Later the same month Asian employees of the Singapore Traction Company went on strike in support of a forty per cent wage increase.⁽⁷⁾ They also demanded a victory bonus of three months salary, and \$20 relief payment to workers who had not been re-employed after the war.⁽⁸⁾ In the Batu Arang Collieries there was a strike the same month over low wages and the rise in rice prices.⁽⁹⁾ These were not isolated incidents. They were symptomatic of widespread discontent caused by poor economic conditions, political instability and by the arrest of Japanese 'collaborators'.⁽¹⁰⁾

(4) Straits Times, 22 October 1945.

(5) Ibid. The Singapore Harbour Board labourers were exposed to Communist pressure from 1945 to mid-1947. From mid-1947 the MCP derived little support from the Indian dock workers. There was a rare interruption in April 1948 when thirty South Indian dock workers were arrested for Communist subversion and exiled to India. M.U. File 335/46, Secret Intelligence Summaries for December 1945 - October 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur). See MU File 171/47, 'Labour Situation Report For Singapore 1947' and 'Singapore Harbour Board Labourers and Communist Influences' (N.A. Kuala Lumpur). See also Stenson, Industrial Conflict in Malaya, p. 218.

(6) Straits Times, 27 October 1945; Stenson, op.cit., p. 218.

(7) Straits Times, 26 October 1945.

(8) Ibid. Gamba, op.cit., p. 180.

(9) Straits Times, 26 October 1945.

(10) BMA File C/1/1/4, Telegram from BMA (Malay peninsula) to BMA (Hqrs.), 29 October 1945 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

The authorities were soon aware of the Indian role in this unrest and their involvement with the MCP. For example, in November 1945 Malayan Union Intelligence reported that the Coastal Indian Association in Klang, formed mainly of ex-members of the Indian National Army had come under Chinese left-wing dominance, and was organizing Indian workers in the area.⁽¹¹⁾ In Singapore the New Indian Democratic Youth League was formed, modelled on the Chinese Democratic Youth League.⁽¹²⁾ Initially it had two hundred members and was led by K.A. Chandran who was also an MCP cadre.⁽¹³⁾ Chandran sympathized with the radicals in the MCP who by this time were convinced that the policy of compromise and conciliation with the British was now futile and that an armed struggle for independence was inevitable.⁽¹⁴⁾ In early December 1945, an Indian Communist Party was formed in Singapore under Mahadev Singh.⁽¹⁵⁾ But almost immediately the Indian

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- (11) M.U. File 335/46, Vol. 1, Intelligence Report No. 3, 29 November 1945; Intelligence Report No. 4, 1 December 1945 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).
- (12) M.U. (Confidential) File 335/46, Vol. I, Intelligence Summary No. 7, 15 December 1945. The objectives of the New Indian Democratic Youth League were outlined as follows :- a) The spread of anti-British propaganda among Indian troops. b) Organization of propaganda missions to India. c) Close liaison with the MCP (MCP financial assistance was openly solicited). d) Fight for Indian Independence. e) Unity among all Indians.
- (13) Ibid. K.A. Chandran was an ex-MPAJA member who later joined the MCP in October 1944. He dominated Singapore's left-wing politics until December 1945. He and the Chinese Communist cadre Lim Boon Kim were keen to retain former arms supplies for a future armed revolution. Two arms dumps on Singapore island were already in the control of Indonesian agitators in the Colony. Chandran also maintained a close rapport with Indian National Congress terrorists in India and Burma.
- (14) M.U. (Confidential) File 335/46, Vol. I, Intelligence Summary No. 7, 15 December 1945 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).
- (15) M.U. (Confidential) File 335/46, Vol. I, Intelligence Summary No. 6, week ending 8 December 1945, p. 12. Report by Brigadier General Staff of Intelligence, 603/4, GSI, 10 December 1945 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

Mahadev Singh's party appears to have had few connections with the New Indian Democratic Youth League nor with the Indian Communist Party of the Indian subcontinent.

Communists on the island suffered a serious setback when Chandran was arrested.⁽¹⁶⁾ Under interrogation he revealed Communist plans for the infiltration of the Singapore Harbour Board work force.⁽¹⁷⁾

Meanwhile the authorities had received reports that Indian Congress Agents, who were sympathetic to leftwing terrorist movements, were being smuggled into Singapore via Burma.⁽¹⁸⁾

The development of the Pan Malayan Federation of Trade Unions (PMFTU) marked the next phase of growing MCP influence over Indian labour.⁽¹⁹⁾ Whilst the MCP supplied the initial impulse for increased trade union militancy, deteriorating socio-economic conditions ensured that this militancy soon acquired a momentum of its own. Therefore, whereas in early 1946 purely economic grievances were sufficient to stimulate strike action, by late 1946 subversion was increasingly in evidence in strikes throughout Singapore and Malaya.⁽²⁰⁾ Indian labour was attracted to the PMFTU essentially because it was more efficiently organized, had strong financial support, and was in a position to force concessions both from the employers and the Government.⁽²¹⁾ The conservative Negri Sembilan

(16) M.U. (Confidential) File 335/46, Vol. I, Intelligence Summary No.6, 10 December 1945 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(17) Ibid.

(18) M.U. (Confidential) File 335/46, Vol. I, Intelligence Summary No.5, 4 December 1945 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(19) See Stenson, op.cit., pp. 147, 199, 200, 203, 205, 206, 208-13, 214, 228-229; A. Short, The Communist Insurrection in Malaya, 1948-60, London, 1975, pp. 302, 470 and 499.

(20) UPAM Circular No. 4 in 1946, 26 April 1946 (R.G.A. Kuala Lumpur); M.U. File 60/46, Vol. II, 'Situation Report, Johore', June - August 1946, 'Situation Report, Selangor', December 1946 - March 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(21) Stenson, op.cit., pp. 182, 188.

Indian Labour Union, which later had branches in Perak and Selangor, resisted the PMFTU and in this it was supported by the Trade Union Adviser of Malaya.⁽²²⁾ However the Union remained insignificant until late 1948, when the Emergency resulted in the collapse of the PMFTU.⁽²³⁾

Indian domination of the PMFTU was particularly evident between 1946-47, when S. Mohan became Vice-Chairman of the Selangor Federation of Trade Unions and P. Veerasenan Vice-President of the Singapore Federation of Trade Unions.⁽²⁴⁾ In January 1947, S.A. Ganapathy, then aged only twenty-two, was appointed President of the PMFTU.⁽²⁵⁾ An analysis of the activities of the principal trade union agitators in this period reveals the extent to which they were influenced by the MCP and therefore the extent to which the Communists exploited discontent within the Indian labouring masses.

Ganapathy's importance lay in the fact that he had been associated with prewar Indian Communism in Malaya, a movement which was largely independent of the MCP.⁽²⁶⁾ Apparently he had been strongly influenced by prewar terrorism in India.⁽²⁷⁾ During the

(22) M.U. File 562/47, enclosure (5), Report by Commissioner for Labour, Malayan Union, 23 August 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur). See also, Stenson, op.cit., p. 100.

(23) For further details on the Negri Sembilan Indian Labour Union, see C. Gamba, The National Union of Plantation Workers: The History of the Plantation Workers of Malaya, 1946-1958, Singapore, 1962, pp. 25-26.

(24) BMA (Public Relations Department) File 3587/46, Chinese Press Summaries, New Democracy, 6 February 1946.

(25) S. Ganapathy was born in 1925. During the Japanese Occupation he was an instructor at the Azad Hind Military School in Singapore. He attended the New Delhi Inter Relations Conference in 1947 as a representative of the PMFTU. He joined the Malayan Races Liberation Army in mid-1948. See Short, op.cit., p. 210.

(26) For a brief account of pre-war Indian Communism in Malaya, see Khoo Kay Kim, 'The Beginnings of Political Extremism in Malaya, 1915-1935', p. 70, Stenson, op.cit., p. 36 and Ampalavanar, op.cit., pp. 113-118.

(27) Short, op.cit., p. 210.

Japanese Occupation, Ganapathy had moved from the self-styled Malayan Indian Communist Party to the Indian National Army under Subhas Bose. However while in the Indian National Army, Ganapathy had resumed his earlier links with the Communists, and shortly before the end of the Occupation he was arrested by the Japanese for being a Communist.⁽²⁸⁾ After the war he joined the PMFTU and consorted openly with the terrorists.⁽²⁹⁾ He edited the Munandi, a Tamil paper subsidized by the MCP.⁽³⁰⁾

His essential attitude in 1945 and 1946 was that the struggle against the British had economic as well as political objectives.⁽³¹⁾ 'The fight for a democratic constitution was also a fight for better food and clothing'.⁽³²⁾ When the MCP later subordinated the economic campaign to the political struggle against the British, Ganapathy was, for a brief period, disenchanted with the Party.⁽³³⁾ But he was soon appointed head of the Indian section of the MCP⁽³⁴⁾ and in June 1948 when the insurrection broke out, he joined the Malayan Races Liberation Army as the MCP now styled itself.⁽³⁵⁾ In April 1949 he was arrested on charges of carrying arms and for consorting with

(28) Ibid.

(29) M.U. File 517/47, Commissioner for Labour Malayan Union, Report for August 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(30) M.U. File 676/47, 'Malayan Newspapers Data' (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(31) M.U. File 60/46, Vol. II, Labour Department Report for 1946, p. 2 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(32) Jananayagam, 10 June 1947; Malaya Tribune, 16 October 1947.

(33) Jananayagam, 12 December 1947.

(34) Ibid., 12 April 1948.

(35) Tamil Nesan, 12 June 1948; Indian Daily Mail, 10 December 1948.

the guerrillas.⁽³⁶⁾ It was also alleged that he had participated in a meeting in Johore in November 1948 when plans were laid to kill a Ceylonese clerk, against whom the Tamil labourers had made several complaints.⁽³⁷⁾

In spite of protests from the Indian community and the intercession of the Indian Government as well as international concern over his arrest, Ganapathy was hanged on 4 May 1949.⁽³⁸⁾ Nehru's bitter reaction to it was that the Malayan Government had acted with extreme folly.⁽³⁹⁾ Alec Newbould, Chief Secretary, Federation of Malaya, complacently believed that 'justice had been done'.⁽⁴⁰⁾ P. Veerasenan, another prominent Indian Communist had been shot dead by Gurkhas on 3 May.⁽⁴¹⁾ It is clear therefore that the estates were open to subversion both from within the Indian community who were eager to see an improvement in working conditions and from outside forces principally the MCP. The estate managers were quick to speak of 'external agitation', referring principally to agitators such as Ganapathy who were from the trade unions.⁽⁴²⁾

(36) UPAM Circular No. 4, April 1949 (R.G.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(37) Short, op.cit., p. 210.

(38) Indian Daily Mail, 20 March 1949, 28 March 1949, 25 April 1949; Malaya Tribune, 2 April 1949, 20 April 1949.

(39) Indian Daily Mail, 13 May 1949.

(40) Malaya Tribune, 13 May 1949.

(41) Indian Daily Mail, 9 May 1949. P. Veerasenan was President of the Singapore Harbour Board Labourers Union, later Vice-President of the Singapore Federation of Trade Unions and it was when he became an executive of the Selangor Federation of Trade Unions that he openly consorted with the guerrillas and with the outbreak of the revolt in 1948 he fled to the jungle and operated in nearby Kuala Selangor district.

(42) M.U. File 1254/46, Part II, Report of Commissioner for Labour, Malayan Union, November 1946, 'Subversion on Estates' (N.A. Kuala Lumpur). For further details on agitators on estates see BMA File 250/46, Secret Monthly Report No. 3, November 1945, p. 14 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur); UPAM Circular No. 5, May 1949 (R.G.A. Kuala Lumpur).

The PMFTU was adept at exploiting the established influence and power of local protest movements on the estates. For example, in Kedah it relied on the Thondar Padai (Youth Corps) led by A.M. Samy, a sixty-year-old shopkeeper on Harvard estate in Kulim.⁽⁴³⁾ Samy's movement was initially influenced by Indian Congress Nationalism and by the Indian National Army but was increasingly affected by Tamil chauvinism and by class unity among the labourers.⁽⁴⁴⁾ It was heavily involved in social reform campaigns principally in support of temperance.⁽⁴⁵⁾ The Thondar Padai youths, dressed in khaki shorts and drill caps with red bands, were an aggressive group. They enforced order on the estates and established informal courts to judge breaches of discipline and behaviour.⁽⁴⁶⁾ The culprits were fined. They also resorted to strikes to intimidate the managers.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Though the Thondar Padai began as a rather anarchical body, resentful of authority, it was soon disciplined by the PMFTU and began to channel its anti-European feelings in more effective ways. It eventually emerged as an organization seeking workers' control of estates.⁽⁴⁸⁾

(43) M.U. File 93/47, enclosure 8, Report of Commissioner for Labour, Malayan Union, 6 August 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur); M.U. File 207/47, Vol. II, Telegram No. 232 from Governor, Malayan Union to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 2 March 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur). A.M. Samy was born in India but had lived in Malaya since 1920. Although he did not join the Indian National Army, he was strongly affected by the movement. He had been also exposed to MCP propaganda during the Japanese Occupation. After the war he was Secretary of the Kedah Federation of Trade Unions in Sungei Patani. He disappeared from Kedah during the March disturbances and in July he returned and established contacts with militant groups in the area.

(44) M.U. File 207/47, Vol. II, 'Report on the South Kedah Disturbances' (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(45) Ibid.

(46) M.U. File 207/47, Vol. II, 'Report on the South Kedah Disturbances'; M.U. File 207/47, Vol. I, Telegram from Governor Malayan Union to Colonial Office, 7 March 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(47) M.U. File 207/47, Vol. II, 'Report on the South Kedah Disturbances' (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(48) M.U. File 207/47, Vol. II, Report of Commissioner for Labour, Kulim, 20 March 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

In Kedah the Thondar Padai was composed largely of tappers and estate school teachers.⁽⁴⁹⁾ They were supported by the New Democratic Mouth League, by the ex-members of the Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army and by the MCP.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Samy's followers were also opposed to the subordinate staff on the estates who were predominantly Ceylon Tamils and Malayalees.⁽⁵¹⁾ Initially Samy had difficulty in attracting the Telegu workers who formed one third of the labour force on the Kedah plantations.⁽⁵²⁾ The Telegus were dissuaded by his temperance programme and by deep-rooted ethnic suspicions. The toddy contractors and the toddy tappers were another group opposed to Samy.⁽⁵³⁾ His relationship with the Labour Department in Kulim was also very strained, essentially because the Assistant Labour Inspector for the district, a Ceylon Tamil, was invariably in conflict with the South Indian Tamil, Samy.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Therefore the Thondar Padai was a lower class protest movement united by Tamil chauvinism and inculcated with the principles of Gandhian social reform of caste and personal discipline. It was anti-authoritarian and thus sympathetic to the Communist propaganda of anti-colonialism and anti-capitalism. Though the

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- (49) M.U. File 207/47, Vol. II, enclosure (A), Secret Report by Deputy Commissioner for Labour, Kedah, 7 June 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).
- (50) Ibid.
- (51) M.U. File 207/47, Vol. II, Report of Commissioner for Labour Kulim, 20 March 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur). A.M. Samy was suspected of the murder in December 1941 of a Ceylon Tamil conductor, S. Karthigesu.
- (52) Ibid.
- (53) M.U. File 207/47, Vol. II, Report of Commissioner for Labour, Kulim, 20 March 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).
- (54) M.U. File 207/47, Vol. II, Confidential Report of Deputy Commissioner for Labour, Kedah, J.T. Rea, 29 March 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

Thondar Padai was active mainly in Kedah, Malacca, Johore and Selangor, it rose to prominence during the Kedah strikes between February and April 1947.⁽⁵⁵⁾

The first of these broke out in Bedong in February 1947, when pickets in front of a toddy shop forced the labourers to boycott the shop.⁽⁵⁶⁾ Police were called and in the violence that followed one worker died and nine others were wounded.⁽⁵⁷⁾ Twelve labourers were arrested and sentenced to three months' imprisonment.⁽⁵⁸⁾ The second strike occurred at Bukit Sembilan estate, when police who came looking for a trespasser, started a riot among the resisting labourers.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Sixty-six people were arrested and all were later dismissed from the estate.⁽⁶⁰⁾ The third incident occurred on the Dublin estate on 17 April 1947 when armed police broke up a labourers' meeting.⁽⁶¹⁾ A Chinese labour leader was shot dead.⁽⁶²⁾ The strong action by the police seems to have been pre-planned. At a meeting in February 1947

(55) Ibid.

(56) Malayan Union Advisory Council Proceedings, 'Report on the Conflict on Dublin Estate, South Kedah, 28 April 1947, C2 - 12. Also published as Report of Commission of Inquiry into Dublin Estate Conflict, 24 February 1948, Federal Legislative Council Paper.

(57) Ibid. Malaya Tribune, 6 September 1947.

(58) Malaya Tribune, 6 September 1947.

(59) Straits Echo, 13 March 1947.

(60) Ibid; Democrat, 27 April 1947; Indian Daily Mail, 20 March 1947.

(61) Democrat, 27 April 1947.

(62) Ibid.

between the planters and the police, it was agreed that a display of force would discourage labour unrest.⁽⁶³⁾ The Police Commissioner for the area, Mr. W. Gouldsbury, was notorious for his aggressive handling of delicate situations.⁽⁶⁴⁾ European families in the area had been evacuated earlier as if in preparation for a violent police manoeuvre.⁽⁶⁵⁾

The Deputy Commissioner for Labour, J.T. Rea, was divided in his attitude towards the strikes. While admitting the deplorable plight of the Indian labourers, he nevertheless confirmed that wages in Kedah were far higher than in Selangor.⁽⁶⁶⁾ He identified 'subversion' as the main cause of the unrest in Kedah.⁽⁶⁷⁾ In his memorandum of 11 February 1947 to the Resident Commissioner of Kedah, he accused Samy and his assistants in the Rubber Workers Union of Sungei Patani and Central Kedah of using labour grievances as a cloak for political subversion.⁽⁶⁸⁾ He quoted one of Samy's emotional

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- (63) Democrat, 27 April 1947. See also, The Findings of the Board of Inquiry into the Kedah Incidents, Kuala Lumpur, August 1947. This was an unofficial enquiry conducted by the MIC with representatives from the MNP, MDU, PMFTU, MCP and All Malaya Council of Rubber Workers Union.
- (64) The Findings of the Board of Inquiry into the Kedah Incidents, pp. 12-13.
- (65) Indian Daily Mail, 10 September 1947.
- (66) M.U. File 207/47, Vol. II, enclosure (A), 'Report on Dublin Estate Riot' by Deputy Commissioner for Labour, Kedah, 7 June 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).
- (67) M.U. File 207/47, Vol. I, Memorandum from Deputy Commissioner for Labour, Kedah, to Resident Commissioner, Kedah, 11 February 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).
- (68) Ibid. 'When I came to Kedah, the Chinese were in the forefront of the General Labour Union, but gradually in 'Indian areas' they have gone into the background. But it is believed they are still directing these Indians whom they regard as puppets' - J.T. Rea, Deputy Commissioner for Labour, Kedah. See also, M.U. File 207/47, Telegram from Governor, Malayan Union to Colonial Office, 16 March 1947, 'Labour situation in Kedah' (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

outbursts, 'drive out the white man, sack the Asiatic staff, let us tap the rubber tree for our own profit; if we are united the Government cannot stop us' (69)

The use of the police and military to break up the strikes aroused extreme anger in the Indian community. S.K. Chettur, the Indian Agent, lamented that 'labour leaders see in the severe police action an attempt to crush the legitimate aspirations of the Indian labourer to better his living conditions'. (70) The Tamil Murasu while admitting the presence of political subversion, reasserted that bad living conditions were responsible for the strikes. (71) The Tamil Nesan of 10 March 1947 condemned the arrogance of the employers. The Indian Daily Mail called for a Committee of Inquiry into the Kedah strikes. (72) It protested at the Registration of Societies Ordinance which was being rushed through the Federal Council and which, it argued, would be used to crush all forms of political expression. (73) Despite long standing suspicions between the MIC and the Thondar Padai (essentially because of class and ethnic differences between the two bodies), the MIC took full advantage of the strikes to support the Tamil workers. (74) It set up its own Board of Inquiry to investigate

(69) M.U. File 207/47, Vol. I, Memorandum from Deputy Commissioner for Labour Kedah, to Resident Commissioner, Kedah, 11 February 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(70) UPAM circular No.4, 20 March 1947, 'Chettur's Report on Kedah Strikes to Government of India' (R.G.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(71) Tamil Murasu, 9 March 1947.

(72) Indian Daily Mail, 11 March 1947.

(73) Ibid.

(74) M.U. File 207/47, Vol. I, enclosure (A), 11 July 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

the strikes.⁽⁷⁵⁾ Its conclusion was that the planters and the police had collaborated in forcefully crushing the strikes.⁽⁷⁶⁾

The planters agitated for a tighter control of labour. The United Kedah Planters Association declared that 'the history of labour trouble in Kedah is one of potential agitation by subversive elements coupled with intimidation and extortion'.⁽⁷⁷⁾ Governor Edward Gent, genuinely afraid of the unrest spreading, accepted the planters' case and cabled the Secretary of State that while there were legitimate grievances, such as the high cost of living and rice scarcity, the labourers were being manipulated by 'outside political agitators'.⁽⁷⁸⁾ He banned the use of uniforms on the estates, a measure directed against the Thondar Padai.⁽⁷⁹⁾ Indeed Samy's organization was outlawed in March 1948.⁽⁸⁰⁾ Gent also criticised the absence of wage uniformity within the planting industry for wage disparities between the states had made it more difficult to control labour.⁽⁸¹⁾

(75) Ibid.

(76) The Findings of the Board of Inquiry into the Kedah Incidents, Kuala Lumpur, August 1947, pp. 12-13. While the official enquiry blamed the Treasurer of the Timber Labourers Union, Lim Ah Soo for extreme provocation and agitation in the strikes, the MIC report blamed the 'degree of cooperation that amounts to collusion between the vested interests on the one hand and the Government executive, the police on the other for the purpose of suppressing ... labour' Ibid., p.2.

(77) Malaya Tribune, 10 June 1947; Short, op.cit., p. 76.

(78) M.U. File 207/47, Telegram from Governor, Malayan Union to Colonial Office, 16 March 1947. See also, M.U. File 207/47, vol.III, enclosure 62(A), 'Summary of reports by the Governor of the Malayan Union regarding recent disturbances on estates in South Kedah' (N.A. Kuala Lumpur). Here Gent was also submitting to pressure from the Commissioner of Police, Kedah, A.S.Haines that the unrest was caused by 'political agitation by illiberal organizations'. Democrat, 27 April 1947.

(79) M.U. File 207/47, Vol. I, Telegram from Governor, Malayan Union to Colonial Office, 7 March 1947.

(80) F.S. File 9356/48, enclosure, 'Registrar of Societies Annual Report 1947' (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(81) M.U. File 207/47, Vol.III, enclosure 62(A), 'Summary of reports by the Governor of the Malayan Union regarding recent disturbances on estates in South Kedah' (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

The Kedah strikes marked a turning point in the history of industrial relations in Malaya. The Government alarmed by the turn of events in 1947, embarked on a programme of strict control of trade unions.⁽⁸²⁾ By June 1947 two hundred and seventy trade unions had been registered.⁽⁸³⁾ There was constant police and managerial harassment of trade union leaders and the arrest of militant trade unionists.⁽⁸⁴⁾ In January 1948 I. Manivelu, the Secretary of the Kedah Federation of Rubber Workers' Unions, was convicted on intimidation charges.⁽⁸⁵⁾ The Penang Harbour Board labourers' fiery leader, S. Appadurai was arrested on a similar charge in February 1948.⁽⁸⁶⁾

Meanwhile tension was increased between the Chinese and Indians in the PMFTU essentially because, apart from traditional racial mistrust, the Chinese placed more importance on political goals, while the Indians, because of increasing police pressure, sought to keep the unions free of political influences.⁽⁸⁷⁾ The attempts of J.A. Brazier, the Trade Union Adviser, to form splinter trade unions among the Indians, in opposition to the MCP unions, added to this tension.⁽⁸⁸⁾ In Perak, Brazier's success was checked by

(82) Labour Department File, E/1/3 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(83) Register of Trade Unions 1947, cited in Stenson, op.cit., p.164.

(84) Jananayagam, 12 December 1947.

(85) Straits Times, 25 February 1948; Stenson, op.cit., p. 190.

(86) Tamil Nesan, 26 February 1948.

(87) M.U. (Labour Department) File 93/47, enclosure (1), Memorandum from Deputy Commissioner for Labour, Kedah to Commissioner for Labour, Malayan Union, 6 October 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(88) Stenson, op.cit., pp. 143-144.

the popularity of R.G. Balan's Rubber Workers Union.⁽⁸⁹⁾ Balan, then aged twenty-seven, was a successful Communist union organizer strongly opposed to Brazier.⁽⁹⁰⁾ Balan was active in lower Perak from late 1947. His Rubber Workers Union^{was} concentrated on the Socfin-owned estates of Lima Blas, Klapa Bali, Slim River and Bagan Datoh where it competed with Brazier's protégé, the Perak Estate Employees' Union.⁽⁹¹⁾ Lower Perak had been a strong MPAJA area during the Occupation and immediately after the war, the New Democratic Youth League emerged as the dominant organizing force on these Socfin estates.⁽⁹²⁾

During 1948 there were eighty-five strikes in Lower Perak alone.⁽⁹³⁾ Balan emerged as the chief instigator of the major disputes. Strikes involving 12,000 labourers broke out on the Klapa Bali and Lima Blas estates in early 1948.⁽⁹⁴⁾ These estates were particularly vulnerable

(89) Ibid., p. 192. R.G. Balan born in Teluk Anson, was a clerk on an estate there and later became a schoolteacher. He was in the MPAJA during the war and after the war became an MCP activist in the labour unions. He was appointed President of the Perak Rubber Workers Union in 1947 and soon after was also elected to the MCP Central Committee. In 1947 he went to Britain as a representative of the MCP to the British Empire Communist Party Conference. He was actively involved in the strikes in 1948 and was arrested while planning to leave for the jungle. In 1955 while in detention he was elected Vice-President of the MCP by the Central Committee. He was released by the Federation Government in 1961 after 13 years of imprisonment. He then joined the Government service as Tamil Reader in the Publications Section of the Ministry of Interior. He is also a member of the Gerakan Raayat Malaysia. (Compiled from Straits Times, 14 April 1960, 28 June 1960, 24 September 1960; Tamil Nesan, 1 April 1961; and from interviews with R.G. Balan, 22.1.75., 24.1.75., Klang, Malaysia.

(90) UPAM Circular No.4, April 1948; Stenson, op.cit., p. 192.

(91) M.U. (Labour Department) File 517/47, enclosure (17), 'M.U. Labour Department Monthly Report for December 1947'; and enclosure (20), 'M.U. Labour Department Monthly Report for April 1948', p. 8. See also Short, op.cit., p. 92.

(92) Short, op.cit., p. 66.

(93) UPAM Circular No.5, May 1948. Short, op.cit., p. 92.

(94) UPAM Circular No.5, May 1948 (R.G.A. Kuala Lumpur).

to agitation because of harsh, unyielding management. Communist subversion reached its height after April 1948 when the estate unions were so disorganized that they could be easily infiltrated.⁽⁹⁵⁾ In the same year three estate managers were killed in the Sungei Siput area of Perak by MCP-led trade unionists.⁽⁹⁶⁾ Balan was arrested in May 1948 and placed under a Restricted Residence Order.⁽⁹⁷⁾ The following month the premises of the Rubber Workers Union were raided and documents seized.⁽⁹⁸⁾ The President and Secretary of the Union were banished to India.⁽⁹⁹⁾ This wave of arrests forced Communist-orientated trade union leaders to flee to the jungle and ultimately this led to the collapse of the PMFTU. With the disintegration of organized labour, the estate managers attempted to revive the panchayats in Lower Perak but this was unsuccessful.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ It is clear that Balan's Rubber Workers Union was more successful in 1948

(95) Ibid.

(96) UPAM Circular No.6, 21 June 1948, p. 2. Tamil Nesan, 17 June 1948; Stenson, op.cit., p. 223.

(97) Malaya Tribune, 3 June 1948.

(98) Short, op.cit., p. 92.

(99) Indian Daily Mail, 17 June 1948.

(100) M.U. (Labour Department) File 517/47, enclosure (18), 'Labour Department Monthly Report for January 1948; Malaya Tribune, 20 August 1949. Panchayat means Council of Five and existed in South Indian villages as a Caste Council responsible for maintaining order and settling caste disputes. On the Malayan plantations, the panchayat originated as a temple committee, assigned with the arrangement of religious festivals but later in the 1930s its powers were extended to include labour-employer relations. The estate management sought to retain this conservative 'arbitration council' in the face of rising industrial militancy in the 1940s.

than in 1947, because in 1948 estate conditions were more anarchical, and unrest was aggravated by low wages and by the Government's repressive measures to control labour and its unions.⁽¹⁰¹⁾

Communist control of Indian labour in Johore and Selangor was more haphazard. There were extensive guerrilla activities in north Johore where the Chinese dominated trade unions often attempted to coerce Indian labour into taking strike action.⁽¹⁰²⁾ In March 1947 strikes broke out on Paloh estate in Kluang.⁽¹⁰³⁾ Here the planters had evidence that Indian labour had been mobilized by a pro-Vietnamese Communist League.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ Labour disturbances were also frequent on Sagil estate near Muar.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ Here in May 1948, the European management alarmed by increasing disorder, arrested four Indians who were banished the following December.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ In 1949, a revival of the Thondar Padai movement in Johore ensured a further brief period of Indian labour militancy.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ In Selangor two Indian agitators, S. Renganathan, editor of the Communist sponsored

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- (101) M.U. (Labour Department) File, 83/47, enclosure (25), Report by Assistant Commissioner for Labour, Perak, 3 November 1947; F.S. File 9356/48, enclosure (26), Report by Assistant Commissioner for Labour Perak, 3 August 1948 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).
- (102) M.U. (Confidential) 60/46, Vol. II, 'Situation Report, Johore, June 1946', 'Situation Report, Johore, August 1946'; M.U. (Labour Department) File 139/47, Report by Commissioner for Labour, Malayan Union, 2 April 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).
- (103) M.U. (Confidential) 63/46, Vol. I, 'Situation Report Johore, 17 March 1947' (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).
- (104) M.U. (Confidential) 63/46, Vol. I, 'Situation Report Johore, 13 February 1947' (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).
- (105) Ibid. M.U. (Labour Department) File 139/47, Circular from Commissioner for Labour, Malayan Union, 12 March 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).
- (106) F.S. File 11328/48, enclosure 126/48, letter from Chief Police Officer, Johore to Commissioner of Police, Federation of Malaya, 5 December 1948 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).
- (107) Tamil Nesan, 20 June 1949.

Jananayagam, and K. Kurup, Vice-Chairman of the Batu Arang Collieries Labour Union, were active between March 1946 and December 1948.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾

There were strikes on almost every estate in Selangor in this period. Local issues were rarely involved; the main impetus for the unrest appears to have been a general dissatisfaction with working conditions accompanied by subversion and intimidation.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾

The unrest in Kedah, Perak, Selangor and Johore exhibited a number of common features. First, the MCP used Indian labour and subversive Indian groups inherited from the time of the Indian National Army, to challenge European authority on the plantations, the wharves and the railways.⁽¹¹⁰⁾ Second, the labour movements were led by the labourers themselves and not by members of the Indian elite. Third, the Indian labour movements were more tightly organized in 1947 than in 1948.⁽¹¹¹⁾ In the latter year labour militancy became more sporadic and uncoordinated, partly because of the repressive legislation and measures

(108) M.U. (Labour Department) File 1254/46, Part I, enclosure, 'Labour Report for July 1946'; M.U. File 60/46, Vol. II, 'Situation Report for Selangor, 5-11 July 1946'; M.U. File 60/46, Vol. II, 'Situation Report by Resident Commissioner, Selangor, 2 - 8 August 1946'; M.U. (Confidential) File 66/H/46, 'Report by Mr. Ross, Deputy Commissioner for Labour, Selangor, 30 November 1946'. M.U. (Labour Department) File 158/47, letter from Assistant Commissioner for Labour, Klang to Deputy Commissioner for Labour, Selangor, 25 February 1947. M.U. (Labour Department) File 158/47, letter from D. Morgan, Assistant Commissioner for Labour, Klang, to Mr. Ross, Deputy Commissioner for Labour, Selangor, 12 July 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur). UPAM Circulars, September 1948, December 1948 (R.G.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(109) Ibid.

(110) M.U. (Public Relations Department) File 235/46, enclosure (1A), 'Report by Commissioner for Labour, Malayan Union, 11 June 1946' (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(111) UPAM Circular, July 1948 (R.G.A. Kuala Lumpur).

introduced by the Government and employers early in the year, and partly because there was increasing confusion in the ranks of the PUFTU over the real objectives of the MCP.⁽¹¹²⁾ With the declaration of the Emergency in June 1948 Communist-dominated trade unions collapsed.⁽¹¹³⁾ Either they were banned, or the arrest of their leaders caused them to disintegrate. The Selangor Estate Workers Union and the Penang Harbour Labour Union were two of the more prominent organizations which collapsed in this way with the detaining of their leaders.⁽¹¹⁴⁾ With the removal of extremist unions, the way was open for conservative organizations (the Negri Sembilan Indian Labour Union being a prime example) to come to the fore.

In late 1948, the PMFTU itself was banned.⁽¹¹⁵⁾ Under the Emergency, powers of detention and deportation of agitators were increased. The Trade Union Amendment Act passed in April 1948, was condemned by the PMFTU for sponsoring 'the formation of a set of subservient trade union organizations under the patronage of the employers and the state'.⁽¹¹⁶⁾ In June 1948 the MCP embarked upon open insurrection, dictated both by developments within the party and by conditions in the country. The events of the years 1945-48 had revealed to the MCP the futility of its policy of appeasement with the British. The British Government was recognizing, tacitly helping and promoting an alternative political force in the UMNO.⁽¹¹⁷⁾ The British were ignoring the credentials of the MCP, most noticeably in the consultations over the Federation Agreement in late 1947.⁽¹¹⁸⁾

(112) Indian Daily Mail, 7 May 1948.

(113) Stenson, op.cit., p. 227.

(114) Ibid., p. 235.

(115) Ibid., p. 234.

(116) Sunday Tribune, 30 May 1948.

(117) M.R. Stenson, Repression And Revolt: The Origins of the 1948 Communist Insurrection in Malaya and Singapore, Ohio, 1969, p.5.

(118) See Chapter IV, pp. 117-119.

Similarly the British deliberately ignored the MCP influence in labour relations. The registration of trade unions in 1948 dealt the final blow to MCP influence in this area.⁽¹¹⁹⁾ Lai Teck, leader of the moderate faction within the MCP, was continually challenged by the revolutionary faction throughout 1946 and 1947.⁽¹²⁰⁾ In March 1947 he disappeared with all the party's funds and this led to the disintegration of the moderate section of the Party.⁽¹²¹⁾ Hence by March 1948 at the Fourth Plenum of the Central Committee of the MCP, the revolutionary wing was in power and a formal decision to revolt was taken.⁽¹²²⁾

The new militancy was first exhibited on the Singapore docks in April 1948.⁽¹²³⁾ A strike was called in support of a series of demands that had been made in the previous February.⁽¹²⁴⁾ But the central objective of the strike certainly went beyond an improvement in wages and conditions. Posters appeared in the name of the Singapore Harbour Board Labour Union calling on the labourers to 'settle their bloody accounts with the British Imperialists', 'to rely on [their] forces to solve all difficulties', and 'to launch a gigantic blood-bath against the Imperialists, should the employers continue to belittle [the labourers] forces'.⁽¹²⁵⁾ In response the police raided the

(119) Stenson, Repression And Revolt, pp. 6-8, 11-14.

(120) Short, op.cit., pp. 40-41; R. Clutterbuck, Riot and Revolution in Singapore and Malaya, 1945-1963, London, 1973, p. 54.

(121) Short, op.cit., pp. 41-42.

(122) Translation of Min Sheng Pau, 29 March 1948, in Federation of Malaya, Commissioner for Labour, File E/3/3 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur). The MCP had recognised by March 1948 that there was no alternative to open insurrection and the instructions from the Calcutta Conference 'may only have added the extra tinder which caused ... [the revolutionary spark] to burst into flame' - Ruth McVey, The Calcutta Conference and the South East Asia Uprisings, Interim Reports Series, Modern Indonesia Project, Ithaca, 1958, p. 24.

(123) Malaya Tribune, 22 April 1948.

(124) Malaya Tribune, 17 April 1948; Jananayagam, 16 April 1948.

(125) Commissioner for Labour, File M/3/1, Deputy Governor's despatch, 14 April 1948, cited in Stenson, Industrial Conflict in Malaya, p. 218.

premises of both this Union and the Singapore Federation of Trade Unions.⁽¹²⁶⁾ Nine labourers were charged and convicted for sedition.⁽¹²⁷⁾ These arrests did not break the strike and by 21 April 1948, a total of 11,000 men were idle.⁽¹²⁸⁾ The Singapore Federation of Trade Unions organized a one day general strike throughout the colony.⁽¹²⁹⁾ Fifty-two thousand workers were reported to have stopped work that day.⁽¹³⁰⁾ But with mounting police oppression, the strikers returned on 27 April.⁽¹³¹⁾ The MCP's intention had been to create industrial chaos, but it had failed because of strong official measures.

The early phase of the MCP revolt concentrated on disrupting the estates and it was here that the Indian workers were most involved. The MCP hoped to establish self-sufficient bases in the estate areas. By late 1948 a significant number of estates were reported to be under varying degrees of Communist control.⁽¹³²⁾ A few European estates were temporarily lost when the managers either left or discreetly permitted the Communists to infiltrate the remoter parts of the plantations, whilst they confined themselves to the safety of their quarters.⁽¹³³⁾ Asian owners of estates had a more difficult time, having little access to police protection. Many Asian managers either paid protection

(126) Straits Times, 21 April 1948.

(127) Ibid. Indian Daily Mail, 22 November 1948. A total of thirty South Indian dockworkers involved in this strike were exiled to India in November 1948.

(128) Straits Times, 21 April 1948.

(129) Ibid., 24 April 1948.

(130) Ibid.

(131) Indian Daily Mail, 28 April 1948.

(132) Short, op.cit., p. 106.

(133) Ibid.

money to the terrorists or abandoned control to the MCP.⁽¹³⁴⁾ The Indian labourers were subverted quite rapidly in those areas where managerial authority was weakened.⁽¹³⁵⁾ Discontent on the estates over the new MPIEA wage rates, that were to be enforced from 1 April 1948 helped further infiltration of the estates by the MCP.⁽¹³⁶⁾ Areas of former MPAJA control such as Slim River Perak, south Malacca and north Johore where arms were already stored and where supply lines were guaranteed, proved to be areas of intense intimidation and widespread strikes.⁽¹³⁷⁾

In the midst of this lawlessness, the British officials on the Legislative Council and the Asian members could not agree about either the fundamental causes of the unrest or the appropriate remedial action.⁽¹³⁸⁾ V.M.N. Menon, a trade union representative on the Legislative Council, called for a Commission of Inquiry into the unrest. At the same time he defended the Indian workers, arguing that they had been made scapegoats and that 'the whole brunt of the Government onslaught in curbing lawlessness in industrial front falls unfortunately on the back of these men who are really misguided and misled in many ways'⁽¹³⁹⁾ Gent rejected this view, pointing out

(134) Malaya Tribune, 8 February 1949. See also Short, op.cit., p. 222.

(135) UPAM Circular, July 1949 (R.G.A. Kuala Lumpur); Short, op.cit., p. 211. Indians in the Sungei Siput area of Lower Perak were readily subverted by MCP activities causing considerable disruption to estates, and by early August 1948 only one estate smokehouse was left standing. Short, op.cit., p. 111.

(136) Labour Department monthly report for April 1948, p.2 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(137) UPAM Circulars September 1948, November 1948, May 1949 (R.G.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(138) Short, op.cit., p. 68.

(139) Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Federation of Malaya (First Session) February 1948 - February 1949, B.244.

that 'British Indians have increasingly become prominent as leaders in recent months in disturbances accompanied by threats of violence'.⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ He hence requested the enforcement of 'banishment of British subjects from the Malay states ... at the very least for an emergency period of say two years'.⁽¹⁴¹⁾ He argued that no amendment to the law was involved and that in practice only Indians were likely to be affected.⁽¹⁴²⁾

The Colonial Office was opposed to the use of the Banishment Ordinance.⁽¹⁴³⁾ Therefore detention without trial became the common practice in coping with the revolt. By August 1948, 150 Indians were under detention and this caused considerable distress to both the local Indian community and the Government of India.⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ In September 1948 R. Ramani attacked the Detention Regulations both on the grounds on which a man could be detained and his limited right of appeal.⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ He saw in the Regulations a reflection of the 'new despotism of the Executive and the newer despotism of the Police'.⁽¹⁴⁶⁾ The majority of the Indian detainees had held office in the PMFTU.⁽¹⁴⁷⁾

(140) Short, op.cit., p. 72.

(141) Ibid.

(142) Ibid.

(143) Ibid., p. 76. The Banishment Enactment, No.10 of 1910 vested the Governor with powers to banish non-British subjects and foreign-born British subjects. Banishment for criminal but not for political offences was revived in the Malayan Union (and permission was given to Singapore to banish for political offences but this was not used until May 1948). Stenson, Industrial Conflict in Malaya, p. 158.

(144) Tamil Nesan, 26 September 1948.

(145) Malaya Tribune, 4 September 1948.

(146) Ibid.

(147) Indian Daily Mail, 10 December 1948.

The Indian Government, increasingly alarmed by the detention of Indian 'militants' initially requested their repatriation to India.⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ Then in February 1949, Nehru announced to the Indian Parliament, the establishment of an enquiry into the case of the detainees.⁽¹⁴⁹⁾

The Indian Government was also disturbed about the arrest of wealthy Chettiars who were alleged to have paid 'protection money' to the guerrillas.⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ The Secretary for Internal Security in Malaya, D.C. Watherston reported in September 1948 that some of the Asian estates and mines, particularly in north and central Johore, were paying protection money to the guerrillas.⁽¹⁵¹⁾ There was strong evidence against Chettiar-owned enterprises.⁽¹⁵²⁾ Faced with this problem, Gurney had originally intended to take over the Chettiars' estates and install European management.⁽¹⁵³⁾ However this was impossible because of the large number of estates involved.⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ In February 1949 fourteen Chettiars were arrested in north Johore on charges of paying extortion money to the insurgents.⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ A further twelve were arrested in Malacca and Muar.⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ In August the same year

(148) Ibid., 10 January 1949.

(149) Ibid., 17 February 1949.

(150) Malaya Tribune, 8 February 1949.

(151) Short, op.cit., p. 222.

(152) Ibid.

(153) Ibid.

(154) Ibid.

(155) UPAM Circular, February 1949; Indian Daily Mail, 12 February 1949.

(156) Malaya Tribune, 8 February 1949.

the problem came to a head when an Indian Councillor from Malacca was arrested on similar charges.⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ Thivy attempted to intervene but was condemned by the Malayan public.⁽¹⁵⁸⁾ This wave of arrests created a panic among the Chettiar firms in Malaya and many sold their business and repatriated their funds to India.⁽¹⁵⁹⁾

The uneasiness within the Indian community over the arrests, was soon replaced by a mood of shock and disbelief when S. Ganapathy, the ex-PMFTU President was hanged on 4 May 1949 for carrying arms and for consorting with the guerrillas.⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ The Indian Government having failed to save Ganapathy was now more determined to save V. Sambasivam also facing a death sentence for illegal arms possession.⁽¹⁶¹⁾ In July 1949 the Indian Government financed Sambasivam's appeal to the Privy Council in London.⁽¹⁶²⁾ In April 1950 the Privy Council acquitted him but six days later he was rearrested under the Emergency Regulations.⁽¹⁶³⁾ The Indian Government pressed for his repatriation to India and finally on 2 June, he was deported.⁽¹⁶⁴⁾

(157) UPAM Circular, August 1949.

(158) Ibid.

(159) Tamil Nesan, 22 January 1950.

(160) Indian Daily Mail, 13 May 1949.

(161) Malaya Tribune, 11 May 1949; Indian Daily Mail, 24 May 1949.

(162) Malaya Tribune, 28 July 1949.

(163) Indian Daily Mail, 1 April 1950.

(164) Tamil Nesan, 4 June 1950. It is reported that shortly before being deported, Sambasivam reaffirmed to the Malayan Special Branch his anxiety over housing, sanitation and the generally deplorable conditions of Indian estate workers in South and Central Malaya. See Short, op.cit., p. 211, footnote 3.

Indian-led dacoity was rampant in Johore and south Kedah in this period for many local Indian youths had been members of the Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army during the Occupation.⁽¹⁶⁵⁾ In July 1949 two Indian terrorists, V. Muthu, the ex-President of the Batu Pahat Rubber Workers Union and his comrade, the ex-President of the Johore Federation of Trade Unions, were killed by security forces.⁽¹⁶⁶⁾ From mid-1949 to early 1950, the Indian section of the MCP was dominated by the former President of the Kedah Rubber Workers Union who had been employed in the Penang Municipality since the Japanese Occupation.⁽¹⁶⁷⁾ He was a skilled cartoonist and the MCP-produced Tamil pamphlets which circulated in Kedah were largely his work.⁽¹⁶⁸⁾ In May 1950, with reports of a resurgence in Communist activity among the Indian tappers in south Kedah, the security forces mounted a counter-offensive.⁽¹⁶⁹⁾ They shot one Indian insurgent and arrested eight others; all nine had been employed as tappers before they had fled to the jungle.⁽¹⁷⁰⁾ In late 1951 work on the estates at Bahau in Negri Sembilan was continuously disrupted by strikes.⁽¹⁷¹⁾ In January the following year British Intelligence reported increasing Communist infiltration among Tamil labourers in the area.⁽¹⁷²⁾

(165) UPAM Circulars, May 1949, July 1949 (R.G.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(166) UPAM Circular, July 1949 (R.G.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(167) UPAM Circular, April 1950 (R.G.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(168) Ibid.

(169) UPAM Circular, May 1950 (R.G.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(170) Ibid.

(171) Federal Legislative Council Proceedings, 22 November 1951, p. 441. See also UPAM Circulars, January 1951, p. 1 and 27 February 1951 (R.G.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(172) UPAM Circular, January 1952, p. 21 (R.G.A. Kuala Lumpur).

By mid-1951 there was evidence that the MCP was engaged in a co-ordinated campaign to recruit Indian labourers to the Party. A document entitled, The rules of the union of workers supporting the liberation struggle was issued by the Indian section of the Central Committee of the MCP in April 1951.⁽¹⁷³⁾ The document outlined plans for the recruitment of Indian labour, first to the divisional committees and then to the Central Committee of the MCP.⁽¹⁷⁴⁾ The labourers were to be attracted by anti-British slogans.⁽¹⁷⁵⁾ Each trade union ^{member} was to be compelled to pay fifty-cents for the supply of food and uniforms to the guerrillas.⁽¹⁷⁶⁾ The MCP's recruiting campaign indicated that the Party was aware that while a few hard-core Indian Communists continued to support it, support from the mass of Indian labour was declining in the aftermath of the hanging of Ganapathy and the shooting of Veerasenan in May 1949.⁽¹⁷⁷⁾ By late 1949 it was evident to the MCP that Indian labour felt 'insufficient enmity with British Imperialists'.⁽¹⁷⁸⁾ Declining militancy was also a result of a rise in wages in the same year.⁽¹⁷⁹⁾

(173) UPAM Circular No.4, April 1951, Addendum A, p. 36, copy to UPAM from Commissioner for Labour, Federation of Malaya (R.G.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(174) Ibid.

(175) Ibid.

(176) Ibid. This document is in accord with MCP's change of policy in 1950 where though hard-core Communist cadres formed the fulcrum of the party, expansion was considered essential at lower levels to include peasants and workers, so that this civilian support or Min Yuen would add a dimension of mass loyalty to the movement. See Short, op.cit., p. 111-112.

(177) Short, op.cit., p. 210.

(178) Stenson, Industrial Conflict in Malaya, p. 218.

(179) Ibid., p. 228.

The Indian Communists suffered further setbacks in 1951 when two Indian terrorists were hanged and approximately nine hundred others arrested.⁽¹⁸⁰⁾ Then in late 1956, the most notorious Indian bandit, V. Ramasamy was killed by the security forces.⁽¹⁸¹⁾ He was aged thirty-six. He had been Vice-Chairman of the PMFTU in 1948 and then leader of the MCP's Indian section. He had worked among the Batu Arang coal miners; indeed, in 1949, all terrorist attacks in that area had been his responsibility.⁽¹⁸²⁾ Also in late 1956, V. Perumal, then aged thirty-one, was murdered by assassins hired by the MCP.⁽¹⁸³⁾ He had worked on an estate in Sungei Siput before fleeing to the jungle in 1948. He was a district committee member of the MCP and commanded an Indian platoon operating in Perak. In August 1956, the Government offered a reward for his capture. The MCP fearing that under interrogation he could betray the Party, had him murdered.⁽¹⁸⁴⁾ By the mid-1950s it was reported that Indian terrorists could be found only in Batu Arang, rural areas of Selangor and in parts of Lower Perak.⁽¹⁸⁵⁾

(180) Indian Daily Mail, 24 May 1951.

(181) Straits Times, 23 September 1956.

(182) In 1949 Ramasamy had made an unsuccessful assassination attempt on the European manager of the Malayan Collieries. Tamil Nesan, 21 December 1949.

(183) Tamil Nesan, 2 December 1956.

(184) Ibid. This practice of eliminating guerrillas suspected of falling into enemy hands was quite common particularly after the defection of Lam Swee in June 1950. See Short, op.cit., pp. 310-311.

(185) The estimates for Indian terrorists in these areas were :- Batu Arang = 7, Selangor = 108, Perak = 90-100. Indian Daily Mail, 22 September 1953, 23 November 1953.

In conclusion, the role of Indian Communists in the MCP revolt was limited. Their most important contribution was to mobilize Indian labour on the estates. In this capacity they succeeded in supplying the guerrillas with food and information as well as bringing work on the estates to a standstill through strike action. But this was the limit of their contribution to the MCP revolt. The impression remains that even when Indian involvement in the MCP was most pronounced, the Indians remained subordinate to the Chinese in the Party. Following the arrival of Gerald Templer in February 1952 there was increased surveillance of labour, wage increases, the introduction of elections and increased representation in Government councils.⁽¹⁸⁶⁾ Inevitably in these circumstances the grip of the Chinese-dominated MCP on the Indian labourer, weakened.

(ii)

What was the response and attitude of the British authorities and the employers to the turmoil and MCP subversion on the estates? Briefly, the period 1945-48 was marked by indecision, 1948-51 by repression, and 1952-57 saw the search for non-Communist alternatives. On the outbreak of the revolt, the Government and the employers disagreed in their analysis of the situation.⁽¹⁸⁷⁾ In 1947 over 300

(186) Short, op.cit., pp. 338-344; Clutterbuck, op.cit., p. 186. Templer's tenure of office from 1952-1954 saw two-thirds of the guerrillas wiped out, while the incident rate dropped from 500 to less than 100 a month and civilian and Security Force casualties declined from 200 to 40 - Clutterbuck, op.cit., p. 186.

(187) Straits Times, 17 June 1948 (editorial 'Govern or get out'), 18 June 1948; Malaya Tribune, 18 June 1948.

strikes had caused considerable disruption on the estates and in the mines.⁽¹⁸⁸⁾ A total of 696,036 man days were lost during the year.⁽¹⁸⁹⁾ In the first half of 1948, 370,464 man days were lost.⁽¹⁹⁰⁾ Employers called for tough action to combat this lawlessness but the higher echelons of the administration and particularly the High Commissioner urged caution.⁽¹⁹¹⁾ S.B. Palmer, the Chairman of the United Planters Association of Malaya blamed the unrest solely on agitators and pressed for the registration of trade unions, the strengthening of the police force and the banishment of all 'subversive elements'.⁽¹⁹²⁾ Even after the violence of the Kedah strikes in 1947, Palmer and the planters resisted pressure from the estate unions for a one hundred percent wage increase and an end to wage disparities between Chinese and Indian labour.⁽¹⁹³⁾

A.W. Wallich, director of a major agency house and Chairman of the Federated Malay States Chamber of Commerce, supported Palmer's demands for firmer control of labour through legislation.⁽¹⁹⁴⁾ He denied that the unrest was 'the manifestation of a discontented and oppressed labour' but 'behind in the shadows skulk the professional sedition mongers',⁽¹⁹⁵⁾ On the other hand, the Government was

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- (188) Noel Barber, The War of the Running Dogs: how Malaya defeated the Communist guerrillas, 1948-1960, London, 1971, p. 21.
- (189) Federation of Malaya, Department of Information, 'Communist Terrorism in Malaya: The Emergency June 1948 - June 1952', Kuala Lumpur, 1952, p. 18.
- (190) Ibid.
- (191) Straits Times, 18 June 1948.
Indian Daily Mail, 10 June 1948.
- (192) Malayan Monitor (London) Vol. 1, No. 9, September 1948, and No. 14 December 1948. UPAM Circular, July 1948. See also Short, op.cit., p. 73.
- (193) Commissioner for Labour, Malayan Union, File 517/47, enclosure, 'Labour Department Monthly Report June 1947', pp. 4-5 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).
- (194) Federal Legislative Council Proceedings, (First Session) February 1948 - February 1949, B.245. See also Short, op.cit., p. 68.
- (195) Short, op.cit., p. 69.

anxious that these wage demands be met in order to prevent the unrest from spreading. It was clear that Gent was not fully sympathetic to the planters and commercial interests.⁽¹⁹⁶⁾ The Commissioner of Police, H.B. Langworthy also remained sceptical of the estimates provided by the Special Branch, of increasing Communist strength in 1947-48, and it is possible that his opinions influenced the High Commissioner and his officials.⁽¹⁹⁷⁾

By May 1948 the planters were crippled by increasing violence on their estates. On 8 June they met and urged Gent to declare a state of Emergency in order to prevent the unrest plunging the country into chaos.⁽¹⁹⁸⁾ The Government responded merely by asking the employers 'to keep a sense of proportion so as not to create an impression that the position was actually worse than it was'.⁽¹⁹⁹⁾ It was only the killing of three planters in Perak on 16 June 1948 that convinced Gent of the seriousness of the situation facing the country.⁽²⁰⁰⁾ The Emergency was declared on 18 June 1948. Following this act, differences of opinion between the Government and the employers over the unrest, faded. But dissatisfaction with Gent continued, not least from within his own circle.⁽²⁰¹⁾ Between 22 - 25 June, Malcolm Macdonald

(196) Ibid., pp. 70, 72; Stenson, Industrial Conflict in Malaya, p.227.

(197) Barber, op.cit., p. 20; Short, op.cit., pp. 120-121; Federation of Malaya, Department of Information, 'Communist Terrorism in Malaya: The Emergency June 1948 - June 1952', p. 18. For a fuller account of John Dalley, M.S.S. Chief and his forecasts of MCP intentions and activities, see Short, op.cit., pp. 80-85, 115-116; Barber, op.cit., pp. 36-37.

(198) Tamil Nesan, 9 June 1948.

(199) Straits Times, 17 June 1948.

(200) Tamil Nesan, 19 June 1948.

(201) Short, op.cit., p. 118; Straits Times, 1 July 1948.

telegraphed to the Colonial Office that Gent had been a stumbling block to prompt action.⁽²⁰²⁾ He had ignored Macdonald's earlier warnings with regard to the seriousness of the situation.⁽²⁰³⁾ Ultimately he had been forced to take action under pressure from 'unofficials' and the military.⁽²⁰⁴⁾ Gent was recalled from Malaya on 29 June 1948 but he died in an air crash over London four days later.⁽²⁰⁵⁾

In the same way that Gent failed to deal effectively with the rising lawlessness and employers' demands in 1948 so in 1947, John Jeff the Commissioner for Labour had failed to withstand pressures from both labour and management over the Kedah strikes.⁽²⁰⁶⁾ Jeff admitted that the low wages and deplorable living conditions on the estates had contributed to the disturbances of 1946-47.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ His handling of the Kedah strikes was heavily criticised by the employers who accused him of 'being out of touch with labour', and demanded his 'replacement by a strong, active and progressive officer'.⁽²⁰⁸⁾

(202) Short, op.cit., p. 118.

(203) Ibid.

(204) Ibid.

(205) Indian Daily Mail, 7 July 1948. It was three months later that the Colonial Office appointed a successor, Sir Henry Gurney who had been Chief Secretary in Palestine during the last two years of the British Mandate.

(206) John Jeff was attached to the Chinese Protectorate in the pre-war years and was appointed to succeed Mr. Nightingale as Commissioner for Labour Malayan Union in 1946. But S.B. Palmer, President of United Planters Association of Malaya was opposed to Jeff's appointment on the grounds that Jeff had no experience of Indian labour. Moreover the UPAM feared that Jeff's appointment was a forerunner to the subsequent amalgamation of Chinese and Indian Labour Offices. (UPAM Circular, No.2, 12 April 1946). This prejudice of Palmer was reiterated at the UPAM annual general meeting on 23 April 1947 where Palmer emphasized that Jeff 'had no knowledge of the Tamil mentality'. Democrat, 27 April 1947.

(207) Jananayagam, 12 April 1947.

(208) Stenson, Industrial Conflict in Malaya, p. 157. Jeff's position was made increasingly untenable by his difficulties with the Trade Union Adviser, John Brazier. See Short, op.cit., p. 66.

He was later recalled to London and in this can be seen Palmer's influence with the authorities. With the arrival of Jeff's replacement, R.G.D. Houghton, there was a general hardening of official and employer attitudes towards labour and the unions. Houghton's first action was to seek a ban on the Thondar Padai, the organization which was responsible for the Kedah strikes.⁽²⁰⁹⁾ In his letter to the High Commissioner, Houghton warned that the Thondar Padai 'was an organization of the same kind which had planned and executed the murder of Gandhi. They are as dangerous as the Triad Societies'.⁽²¹⁰⁾ Houghton's major task was the reorganization of the trade unions. His recommendations in this area were repressive. He ensured the gradual decline of the militant PMFTU by recommending that only unions with similar objectives could combine.⁽²¹¹⁾ He also banned from office unionists convicted on charges of intimidation and extortion.⁽²¹²⁾ The rapprochement between the Government and employers in the post June 1948 period was assisted by a close liaison between Houghton and the Secretary of the Malayan Planting Industries Employers Association, C.D. Ahearne.⁽²¹³⁾

(209) F.S. File 11328/48, enclosure, 'Memorandum from R.G.D. Houghton to the High Commissioner, Federation of Malaya, 22 January 1949' (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(210) Ibid.

(211) C. for L., E/1/3, Houghton to C for L, Singapore, 30 December 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(212) Ibid. See also Stenson, Industrial Conflict in Malaya, p. 168.

(213) Stenson, Industrial Conflict in Malaya, p. 186.

Another dominating figure in industrial relations in this period was the Trade Union Adviser, J.A. Brazier, a fervent anti-communist, who was faced with a labour movement which was rapidly being subverted by the Communists. Prior to the violent strikes of 1946-47 he was confident of promoting a liberal trade union movement free of political control.⁽²¹⁴⁾ After 1947 it was clear to Brazier that only a paternalist trade union movement could wean the labourers away from MCP domination.⁽²¹⁵⁾ Brazier maintained good relations with the English-educated Indian trade unionists of the Government service.⁽²¹⁶⁾ However he failed to gain the support of the semi-literate railway and estate unionists.⁽²¹⁷⁾ This was apparent in his dealings with the Perak Federation of Trade Unions.⁽²¹⁸⁾ Finding that he had little support from the militant Indian unionists of the Perak Federation of Trade Unions, he attempted in mid-1947 to install John Emmanuel as leader but in this he was vehemently opposed by the dedicated MCP member, R.G. Balan.⁽²¹⁹⁾ Brazier's paranoia with regard to Communism made a clash with the PMFTU inevitable. By mid-1947 he was convinced of the futility of promoting 'liberal' unions. Indeed he supported the repressive

(214) Ibid., pp. 142-143.

(215) Ibid.

(216) Ibid., p. 192. Jananayagam, 22 June 1947.

(217) Jananayagam, 22 July 1947.

(218) Indian Daily Mail, 4 April 1948. Stenson, Industrial Conflict in Malaya, p. 192.

(219) Stenson, Industrial Conflict in Malaya, p. 192.

legislation which the Government was then introducing to control the unions.⁽²²⁰⁾ As M.R. Stenson concludes, 'The role of Brazier with the encouragement of 'liberals' Gent and Macdonald, was of significance less for its constructive value in creating 'genuine' independent unions than for the legitimacy which it granted to increasingly restrictive and eventually destructive, regulatory policies and actions.'⁽²²¹⁾

S.P. Garrett, the Trade Union Adviser in Singapore, was a fervent indeed militant unionist, but even so he failed to gain support from the Singapore Federation of Trade Unions. He was opposed to trade union registration and persuaded the authorities to waive registration requirements for the Singapore Federation of Trade Unions, though its affiliates had to be registered.⁽²²²⁾ The Singapore unionists found him ambivalent. The President of the Singapore Federation of Trade Unions, a loyal MCP member accused Garrett of being 'neither pro-Government, pro-employer nor pro-employee'.⁽²²³⁾ Garrett's relationship with the Government and employers deteriorated during the wave of strikes in Singapore in early 1947. He accused the employers of using the 'Red bogey' to 'resist social progress'.⁽²²⁴⁾ He resigned the same year, a profoundly disappointed man. This marked the end of formal resistance to the economic policies being pursued by the Government and the employers in the late 1940s.

(220) Ibid., p. 140.

(221) Ibid., p. 193.

(222) Malaya Tribune, 28 August 1946.

(223) Straits Times, 7 May 1947.

(224) Malaya Tribune, 3 February 1947. Singapore Free Press, 5 May 1947.

With the passing of the Amended Trade Unions Ordinance in 1948, and the desertion of the militant unionists to the jungle, the overwhelming majority of the workers were left unorganized. By the end of the year there were only 162 trade unions in Malaya and 100 in Singapore.⁽²²⁵⁾ In 1947 there had been 289 trade unions in Malaya and 118 in Singapore.⁽²²⁶⁾ The year 1949 saw further reductions.⁽²²⁷⁾ The only trade unions to survive the Emergency were those sponsored by the Trade Union Adviser. They survived essentially because of their moderate character, and the rise in estate wages which occurred during the Korean War boom of 1950-51 helped to consolidate this trend towards conservative unionism. It should also be noted that the greater proportion of unions which survived were Indian-dominated, partly because of their conservatism, and partly because the authorities paid more attention and indeed tended to proscribe Chinese-dominated unions.⁽²²⁸⁾

In the early 1950s the Negri Sembilan Indian Labour Union, the Perak Estate Employees Union, the Johore Plantation Employees Union and the Malacca Estate Employees Union worked together, bound by close ethnic ties. In addition, there was co-operation between the Kedah Plantation Workers Union and the Selangor Plantation Workers Union despite serious leadership conflicts.⁽²²⁹⁾ These six unions had a combined membership of 56,000 in 1952, of whom more than half was Indian.⁽²³⁰⁾ In 1954 all these state unions amalgamated to

(225) Annual Report on the Trade Unions Registry, 1948, p. 2;
Singapore Labour Department Annual Report, 1948, Table XXVI.

(226) Gamba, The Origins of Trade Unionism in Malaya, p. 154.

(227) Stenson, Industrial Conflict in Malaya, p. 234.

(228) Ibid., p. 238.

(229) UPAM Circulars, 12 December 1952, and August 1952, p. 10 (R.G.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(230) Gamba, The National Union of Plantation Workers, p. 47.

form the National Union of Plantation Workers under P.P. Narayanan. The amalgamation was prompted by impending strike action over the Taylor Wages Award of 1953, the agreement being unfavourable to estate workers.⁽²³¹⁾ But a sudden rise in the price of rubber led the employers to concede the wage increases.⁽²³²⁾ Subsequently in 1955 the National Union of Plantation Workers negotiated with the employers over a decision to cut wages following an increase in the export duty on rubber. They agreed to a system of calculating wages on the gross price of rubber and this Agreement was implemented in August 1955.⁽²³³⁾ In early 1956 the union initiated a series of strikes in support of a demand for a minimum wage.⁽²³⁴⁾ In June, the employers responded with a small wage increase. It was only in 1958 that the Union achieved its objective of an estate wage structure independent of rubber prices.⁽²³⁵⁾

The NUPW was concerned not only with industrial questions but also functioned as a reform organization seeking a prohibition on toddy sales and promoting education for workers' children.⁽²³⁶⁾ The Union epitomized the important role of Indians in the labour movement. Indian labour was relatively homogenous and was concentrated on the estates and in certain Government departments. Therefore it could be readily mobilized. Educated Indians who had attempted to lead non-communal political parties in the 1940s found themselves obsolete in the growing communalism of the 1950s.

(231) Ibid., pp. 73-74; Tamil Nesan, 21 September 1953.

(232) Arasaratnam, op.cit., p. 145.

(233) Ibid.

(234) Ibid.

(235) Ibid., p. 146.

(236) Gamba, The National Union of Plantation Workers, pp. 118-120, 124-126.

Therefore they channelled their energies and talents into the trade union movement. With the collapse of the Chinese-directed but Indian-dominated PMFTU, the Government sought the aid of these educated Indians to lead the moderate labour movement. In March 1950, the Government-sponsored Malayan Trade Union Congress had as President P.P. Narayanan, Secretary E.E. Nathan, and Treasurer M.P. Rajagopal.⁽²³⁷⁾ This simply reflected the fact that the majority of unionists in Malaya were Indians.

The appointment of Indians to executive positions in the trade unions also occurred in Singapore. However, here it would appear that where the majority of unionists were Chinese, Indian activists were often appointed to militant Chinese-dominated unions, as if to provide them with Indian 'respectability'. For example, the Singapore Traction Company Employees Union was led by Devan Nair, a school teacher, the Singapore Harbour Board Staff Association was led by Jamit Singh a lawyer and in 1953 the Naval Base Labour Union was guided by S. Woodhull a militant graduate of Singapore University.⁽²³⁸⁾ All these were Chinese left wing trade unions.

(237) Arasaratnam, op.cit., p. 153.

(238) Yeo Kim Wah, Political Development in Singapore, 1945-55, pp. 240-241.

Malayan Union To Federation Agreement: The Indian Response

(i)

Immediately on their return to Malaya, the British proposed major constitutional changes for the country. The Malayan Union scheme, first announced on 10 October 1945, envisaged the creation of a unitary state from the nine Malay states, plus Penang and Malacca.⁽¹⁾ Singapore was to be constituted as a separate crown colony.⁽²⁾ Citizenship was to be granted on the basis of jus soli, that is it could be claimed by all those born in the Malayan Union or Singapore, whether Malay, Chinese or Indian.⁽³⁾ In order to introduce these radical changes, it was necessary for the British to negotiate new treaties with the Malay rulers, by which the British Government would be able to exercise full jurisdiction within the Malay states.⁽⁴⁾

According to M.N. Sophe, the Malayan Union was an attempt 'to create the basic political infrastructure allowing for movement towards eventual self-rule', essentially through the creation of a 'Malayan consciousness and nationalism'.⁽⁵⁾ The proposed unitary state would help destroy the divisive state loyalties which were strong amongst the Malays whilst for the Chinese and Indians, citizenship rights would encourage them to sever their ties with their homelands.⁽⁶⁾ The result, it was hoped, would be the creation

(1) Great Britain, Malayan Union and Singapore: Statement of Policy on Future Constitution, Cmd. 6724, London, 1946.

(2) Ibid., p.3.

(3) Ibid., p. 1.

(4) See Hansard, 414, HC DEB 58', columns 255-256.

(5) M.N. Sophe, From Malayan Union to Singapore Separation: Political Unification in the Malaysia Region, 1945-65, Kuala Lumpur, 1974, pp. 16-17.

(6) J.V. Allen, The Malayan Union, New Haven, 1967, p. 13.

of a common identity which would form an important basis for eventual self-rule. However as M.R. Stenson has argued the Malayan Union proposals were, at heart, undemocratic.⁽⁷⁾ First, the proposed Legislative Council was to be nominated, not elected. Second, the powers of the Council were to be severely restricted. Third, the proposed citizenship rights in practice did not confer any privileges that were not already available to non-citizens.⁽⁸⁾

The initial Indian response to the Malayan Union proposals was very weak. The Central Indian Association of Malaya, at that time the only pan-Malayan Indian organization, simply invited comments on the proposals, which it would in turn submit to the authorities.⁽⁹⁾ Only the Selangor Indian Association, and a few scattered individuals responded to this invitation.⁽¹⁰⁾ However it would appear that this poor response was less a reflection of Indian indifference to the proposals than of the community's unwillingness to become involved with the Central Indian Association of Malaya, whose leadership had been severely scarred by its involvement in the 1941 Klang strikes and in the Indian Independence League. Indeed in 1945 many of the Association's leaders had been detained by the British on charges of 'collaboration'.⁽¹¹⁾

(7) M.R. Stenson, 'The Malayan Union And The Historians', Review Article, JSEAH, Vol. X, No.2, September 1969, p. 347.

(8) See, White Paper, Malayan Union and Singapore: A Summary of Proposed Constitutional Arrangements, Cmd. 6749, London, 1946, Section 23.

(9) Tamil Nesan, 27 April 1946.

(10) Ibid., 7 May 1946.

(11) See Chapter II, pp. 32-33. See also Chapter 1, p. 21, footnote 48.

The Indian Press made no mention of the Malayan Union proposals until 27 October 1945, and there was no editorial comment until 1 February 1946.⁽¹²⁾ Food shortages, rising prices and industrial unrest were the main preoccupations of the Tamil Press in this period. This was in strong contrast with the Malay Press which was deeply perturbed by the proposals.⁽¹³⁾ However, by early 1946, as more details of the Malayan Union proposals became known, Indian opinion began to crystallize. On 26 March 1946 the Jananayagam, an extreme left-wing newspaper published in Kuala Lumpur and subsidized by the MCP, vehemently denounced the Malayan Union.⁽¹⁴⁾ The paper was particularly suspicious of the proposal to separate Singapore, arguing that 'the British Government considers that if Singapore remains under its direct rule it will be possible for the pursuance of her colonial policy The Malayan Union does not in the least accept democracy and self rule ... The Malayan Union is introduced to strengthen the methods of administration and to plundering the country. It is a plan to divide Malaya to satisfy the needs of the imperialists'.⁽¹⁵⁾ Similar objections were expressed by the Tamil Murasu and the Sevika.⁽¹⁶⁾

The Tamil Press was joined in its denunciation of the Malayan Union by the pro-Malay, extremist Indian Muslim Press, most notably the Islamic Voice of Malaya, edited by Sultan Marakkayar, and the Malaya Nanban, edited by Karim Ghani.⁽¹⁷⁾ The latter criticised what it called the

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- (12) M.U. Information Department File 32B/45, 'Indian Press Summaries', October 1945 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur); Tamil Murasu, 1 February 1946.
- (13) Utusan Melayu, editorial, 16 October 1945; Warta Negara, editorial, 10 November 1945; Utusan Melayu, 22 December 1945.
- (14) Jananayagam, 26 March 1946.
- (15) Ibid.
- (16) Tamil Murasu, 2 April 1946; Sevika, 8 April 1946.
- (17) Islamic Voice of Malaya, 11 February 1946; Malaya Nanban, 22 August 1946.

intrusion of outsiders, that is non-Malays, in Malaya's internal politics and claimed that the Malays were 'the owners of the country'.⁽¹⁸⁾ Yet there is little or no evidence that the Malays responded to this Indian Muslim opposition to the Malayan Union. Essentially Indian Muslim political opinion carried little weight in Malay circles in these years.⁽¹⁹⁾ Indeed not all Indian Muslims were pro-Malay with regard to the Malayan Union. For example, moderate Muslim newspapers, such as the Dhesa Nesan from Penang, viewed the Malayan Union plan as 'the first step towards self-government', though it added that 'the administration should be in conformity to the principle of Islam'.⁽²⁰⁾

Several attempts were made to heal the divisions within the Indian Muslim community over the Malayan Union plan. Most prominently, a number of Indian Muslim organizations, which had been defunct since 1941, were revived in order to consolidate the community's view.⁽²¹⁾ But the most significant result of this revival was a concerted attempt to secure separate communal representation for Indian Muslims, similar to that granted under the Montague-Chelmsford reforms in India in 1919.⁽²²⁾ The assistance of Jinnah was sought on this issue. Other moderate minorities within the Indian community, the Ceylonese, Punjabis and Malayalees, gave vague approval to the Plan.⁽²³⁾ Similarly the Chettiars accepted the proposals, though the All Malaya Chettiars Chamber of Commerce, through Roland Braddell, expressed concern as to whether the

(18) Malaya Nanban, 22 August 1946.

(19) This was in strong contrast to the 1950s when Indian Muslim electoral support was highly valued by the Malays particularly in Penang and Singapore. See Chapter II, pp.

(20) Dhesa Nesan, 19 March 1946.

(21) Malaya Nanban, 22 August 1946. See also M.U. (Confidential) File 7426/46 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(22) Sevika, 2 January 1947.

(23) M.U. Information Department File 533/46, 'Malayan Press Digest', No.20, November 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur); Tamil Nesan, 22 June 1946.

adoption of Malayan Union citizenship would necessitate the relinquishing of British Indian nationality.⁽²⁴⁾

The diverse and scattered response of the Indian community to the Malayan Union can, in part, be explained by the fact that throughout the first half of 1946 the community's attention was focused on political developments in India itself. However, in mid-1946 it seems clear that the majority of Indians welcomed two features of the Plan, the prospect of common Malayan citizenship, and the centralization of government, though they deplored the fact that the new Constitution did not confer democratic rights and represented no 'political advancement on the 1941 status'.⁽²⁵⁾ Only left-wing Indian organizations and the left-wing Tamil press were clearly apprehensive of the scheme. For example, in a memorandum to Nehru in December 1946, the New Indian Democratic Youth League in Singapore declared that 'the ushering in of the Malayan Union scheme is calculated to denationalize the Indians and the Chinese'.⁽²⁶⁾ It was only with the formation of the MIC in August 1946 that Indian society was effectively organized on this constitutional issue, and the community developed an awareness of the deeper implications of the Malayan Union scheme.

With regard to the Chinese population, the radical Chinese view, as represented by the MCP, rejected the Malayan Union on the grounds that it did not provide for elections, that the powers of the Governor in Council were deemed excessive, and that the separation of Singapore was politically and economically illogical.⁽²⁷⁾ The MCP demanded universal

(24) Tamil Nesan, 18 April 1946.

(25) M.U. (Confidential) File 60/46, vol. II 'Indian Reactions And Press Comments', January-June 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(26) Indian Daily Mail, 5 December 1946.

(27) The Democrat, 9 March 1946.

adult suffrage, an elected assembly and the inclusion of Singapore.⁽²⁸⁾ The Party's view was supported by the Indian labouring masses through the PMFTU. Here the radical Chinese made no call for the establishment of a socialist state for fear of alienating moderate opinion.⁽²⁹⁾ More moderate Chinese were less antagonistic towards the proposals, being attracted by the opportunity to acquire citizenship. However they expressed discontent over the long residential requirement for citizenship and demanded that Chinese be accepted as a language qualification.⁽³⁰⁾

Finally the Malayan Democratic Union, a non-communal party, composed of English-educated liberals, welcomed the Plan as 'a progressive move', but totally opposed the exclusion of Singapore, and the wholly-nominated nature of the proposed Legislative Council.⁽³¹⁾ The Party also drew attention to the fact that it was far from clear what rights a Malayan Union citizen would enjoy in Singapore and vice versa.⁽³²⁾ In conclusion, it is clear that between April and November 1946, both the Indian and Chinese communities responded with some vigour to the Malayan Union proposals, though the response was far from united, and was certainly not as vehement as that from the Malay community. In other words, earlier writers on this subject have erred in concentrating too greatly on the Malay reaction to the Plan.⁽³³⁾ In particular, J. Allen has very seriously under-estimated the Indian and Chinese interest in this Constitutional reform.⁽³⁴⁾

(28) Ibid., 12 May 1946.

(29) Ibid.

(30) Malaya Tribune, 10 May 1946.

(31) Malayan Standard, 10 May 1946; Malaya Tribune, 4 May 1946.

(32) See 'Malayan Democratic Union's Statement on Citizenship', in Malayan Standard, 17 April 1946, 17 June 1946.

(33) See, Allen, op.cit., pp. 19, 70; K.J. Ratnam, Communalism and the Political Process in Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1965, pp. 54-57. M.R. Stenson in his review article 'The Malayan Union and the Historians', JSEAH, vol. X, No.2, September 1969, pp. 344-354, was among the first to draw attention to this earlier neglect of the non-Malay response to the Malayan Union.

(34) Allen, op.cit., p. 70.

As with the Indians and the Chinese, the Malays took a few months to respond clearly to the Malayan Union Plan, for in the second half of 1945, food shortages, racial conflict and inflation were the main preoccupation.⁽³⁵⁾ Even so there was a scattered initial reaction. In early October 1945, the liberal Malay paper Utusan Melayu, gave a general welcome to the scheme though it expressed some misgivings about the fate of the Malays under the new Constitution.⁽³⁶⁾ Indeed, in the same month the Malay Sultans were seriously antagonized by the arrogant and high-handed behaviour of the Special British Representative, Harold MacMichael, who had been sent from London to negotiate fresh treaties with them. The Sultans responded by engaging a legal adviser, by writing to retired MCS officials in England to encourage them to mount a campaign in the British Press and Parliament, by aligning themselves with the Malay political parties and by threatening to petition King George VI.⁽³⁷⁾

In November 1945 the Kesatuan Melayu Johore was formed by Malay aristocrats and Malay civil servants, to channel and consolidate the Malay ferment.⁽³⁸⁾ It was soon followed by similar organizations, most notably the Peninsular Malay Movement of Johore led by Onn bin Jaafar. December 1945 witnessed the first public demonstration by the Malays against the Malayan Union. When the British Government published a White Paper on the constitution in January 1946, the Malay community was convulsed with anger. Letters were written to The Times, retired MCS officials lobbied the authorities in London, and in March, forty-two Malay organizations met to devise a campaign to defeat the Malayan Union.⁽³⁹⁾

(35) A.J. Stockwell, 'The Development of Malay Politics during the Course of the Malayan Union Experiment, 1942-48', Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1973, p. 98.

(36) Utusan Melayu, 12 October 1945.

(37) Allen, op.cit., pp. 41-45.

(38) For a good discussion on the Malay opposition to the Malayan Union, see Stockwell, op.cit., pp. 109-125.

(39) Ibid., pp. 112-113.

This group was soon to form itself into the UMNO, which organized a boycott of the installation of the new Governor, Edward Gent, and refused to cooperate with Governmental reorganization.⁽⁴⁰⁾ The strength of Malay opposition to the Plan was also conveyed to the British Government by L.D. Gammans, a Conservative Member for Parliament, who visited Malaya in May 1946.⁽⁴¹⁾

Malay objections to the Malayan Union were clear: it threatened the sovereignty of the Malay rulers, and it gave citizenship to non-Malays.⁽⁴²⁾ On this latter point, the Malay rulers wrote to the Governor, explaining that they opposed the citizenship provisions because 'they will and must mean extinction of the Malay state nationality and lead to the submergence of the Malay race ... If the alien races are to have the same political rights as the Malays they should have the same duties and should regard themselves as subjects of the respective rulers, which their Highnesses would welcome very much'.⁽⁴³⁾ The Sultans also expressed severe reservations with regard to the loyalty to Malaya of the Indian and Chinese population.⁽⁴⁴⁾

There is now in Malaya a strong and organized Indian National movement. The Indians in Malaya though they must use these political rights, will never regard themselves as anything but Indian or have that tie with the British Empire which the Malays have always had in the past and wish to continue to have'.⁽⁴⁴⁾

(40) Ibid., p. 109; Straits Times, 6 March 1946. For details on the early history of the UMNO see, A.J. Stockwell, 'The Formation and First Years of the United Malays National Organization', Modern Asian Studies, vol. 11, part 4, October 1977, pp. 481-513.

(41) M.U. (Confidential) File 60/46, Vol. II, 'Situation Report for May 1946', 19-30 May 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur); Malaya Tribune, 11 June 1946'.

(42) M.U. (Confidential) File 294/46, 'Record of Meeting held with Malay Rulers and leading Malays at Kings House, 25 July 1946'. A detailed copy of the memorandum of the Rulers and the UMNO, pertaining to citizenship is attached to the minutes of this meeting. (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(43) Ibid.

(44) Ibid.

In the light of this memorandum alone, Allen's contention that 'what the Sultans were concerned about ... was not citizenship but the loss of their sovereignty', cannot be sustained.⁽⁴⁵⁾

Initially, left-wing Malay parties, most notably the Malay Nationalist Party favoured the Malayan Union, essentially because it implied political uniformity and eventual self-government.⁽⁴⁶⁾ But by February 1946 the Malay Nationalist Party had turned against the Scheme on the following grounds: MacMichael's treatment of the Sultans; the fact that in preparing the White Paper, the British had not consulted Malay opinion; and the proposed exclusion of Singapore.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Moreover the Party began to fear that if it continued to support the Union, it would become isolated from growing Malay nationalism, based on anti-Malayan Union fervour. It is also perhaps worth noting that the Malay Nationalist Party was the first political organization to demand that Malay be accepted as an official language.⁽⁴⁸⁾ However the Party never acquired substantial influence, partly because its republicanism was repugnant to Malay society as a whole.⁽⁴⁹⁾

Formal Indian political protest against the Malayan Union appeared only with the formation of the MIC in August 1946. The MIC opposed the Scheme on the grounds that it had been imposed on the country by the

(45) Allen, op.cit., p. 47.

(46) M.U. (Confidential) File 335/46/S, Hqrs., Malaya Command, Intelligence Summary, 7-15 December 1945, p. 9 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(47) M.U. Information Department, File P.R. 77/46, 'Manifesto of the Malay Nationalist Party with regard to the White Paper on the Malayan Union', 3 February 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(48) Ibid.

(49) For further details on the Malay Nationalist Party ideology, see Stockwell, op.cit., pp. 86-92; N.J. Funston, 'The Origins of Parti Islam Se Malaysia', JSEAS, vol. 7, No.1, March 1976, pp. 59-61.

British without any prior consultation with the local people.⁽⁵⁰⁾

The general opinion amongst the Indian community was that Malaya was a Malay country and should remain so.⁽⁵¹⁾ It followed that the Indians would not accept any constitutional reform that was unacceptable to the Malays. Thus in December 1946 Thivy reassured the Malays that the Indians would 'never appeal over the heads of the Malays to the British for any particular right or privilege in the task of establishing a constitution for Malaya; if we do so we would be sowing the seeds of communal dissensions'.⁽⁵²⁾ Moreover Thivy was convinced that 'Malaya under the new constitution will still be backward so far as responsible government is concerned'.⁽⁵³⁾ He also objected to the fact that, under the Malayan Union, the Sultans were deprived of their prerogatives, arguing that the sovereignty of the Sultan should be a real rather than a hollow concept.⁽⁵⁴⁾

However the position of the MIC on the constitutional issue was undermined by criticisms from local-born Indians, who resented the domination of the party by foreign-born Indians, whom they dismissed as birds of passage. The Indo-Malayan Association, claiming to represent Indians born in Malaya, warned the MIC not to interfere in

(50) Resolutions Passed At MIC Regional Delegates Meeting, Sentul, Kuala Lumpur, 17 November 1946 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur); Jananayagam, 18 November 1946; Tamil Nesan, 19 November 1946. It should be noted, however, that by November 1946, the Malayan Union had been suspended and the British, the Sultans and the UMNO were involved in secret negotiations for a new constitution. Indeed, the British change of heart had occurred between March and July 1946. See, Allen, op.cit., p.24.

(51) First Presidential Address by J. Thivy at first annual session of the MIC, Kuala Lumpur, 7 June 1947 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(52) Ibid.

(53) Malaya Tribune, 24 February 1947; Jananayagam, 25 February 1947.

(54) Jananayagam, 25 February 1947.

local politics and dismissed the Congress' comments on the Malayan Union as 'being very mischievous'.⁽⁵⁵⁾ The MIC's stand was further undermined by class and ethnic divisions within the community. Most notably the Indian working class tended to follow the line of the MCP, and therefore totally rejected the new Constitution, while the more conservative groups within the community generally favoured it.⁽⁵⁶⁾ Despite these difficulties, Thivy and the local Indian political leadership were constant in their support of the Malays and Malay rights throughout the first half of 1946. Indeed Thivy even attempted to persuade the Sultans and the UMNO to join with the non-Malays against the British.⁽⁵⁷⁾

However this conciliatory attitude on the part of the MIC President changed radically after July 1946, with the formation of a Working Committee, composed solely of the Government, the Sultans and the UMNO, designed to prepare a new draft constitution to replace the Malayan Union. The formation of this Committee caused Thivy to realize that the major divisions within the Malayan community were not simply between Malays and non-Malays but also between conservative Malays (typified by the UMNO) and the radical Malays (principally the Malay Nationalist Party).⁽⁵⁸⁾ Thivy was particularly stung by the fact that the UMNO had

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- (55) M.U. (Confidential) File 733/46, Malayan Intelligence, Letter from Indo-Malayan Association to the Governor, Malayan Union, 24 November 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur). In 1947, local-born Indians comprised slightly over fifty per cent of the total Indian population - M.V. Del Tufo, Malaya, A Report On The 1947 Census of Population, London, 1949, p. 85.
- (56) M.U. Information Department File 533/46, 'Malayan Press Digest', No.20, November 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).
- (57) Malaya Tribune, 18 January 1947.
- (58) 'The History of the Congress Association in the Constitutional Issue', p. 7 (Thivy Papers, n.d. University of Malaya Library, Kuala Lumpur). This Paper was also submitted to the second annual session of the MIC, in mid 1948 and its authorship was then attributed to the MIC working committee. However the language and the views of the Paper reveal more of the personality of J. Thivy.

entered into secret negotiations with the British, and he accused the Party of unscrupulously playing on Malay fears of 'being overwhelmed by the immigrant population'.⁽⁵⁹⁾ The UMNO was 'founded on a narrow fascistic concept of racialism'.⁽⁶⁰⁾ In contrast, again according to Thivy, the Malay Nationalist Party 'believes that the main problem before the community is the elimination of imperial exploitation ... These people then are our automatic allies'.⁽⁶¹⁾

The MIC became even more critical of the UMNO and conservative Malays after the report of the Working Committee appeared in December 1946.⁽⁶²⁾ Indeed, the same month the MIC joined the AMCJA coalition, and from then began a vigorous campaign for non-Malay political rights. It outlined proposals for a new constitution which would entail single citizenship, Thivy criticizing dual citizenship on the grounds that it would 'make the citizen lukewarm in his loyalty to this country'.⁽⁶³⁾ It was also proposed that citizenship would automatically bestow nationality. The MIC further pressed for the inclusion of Singapore in the Constitution of the mainland and for a fully-elected Legislative Council.⁽⁶⁴⁾

(59) Ibid., p. 6.

(60) Ibid., p. 7.

(61) Ibid.

(62) Malay Mail, 23 December 1946. The Working Committee Report which was first published on 24 December 1946, later appeared as Great Britain, Federation of Malaya: Summary of Revised Constitutional Proposals, Cmd. 7171, London, 1947.

(63) Malaya Tribune, 27 January 1947.

(64) Jananayagam, 23 December 1946. 'Nominated Councillors can hardly be expected to bite the hand that selected them', J. Thivy commented, Malaya Tribune, 27 January 1947.

The AMCJA was a loose coalition of various political organizations, including the Malayan Democratic Union, the Malayan New Democratic Youth League, the Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army Old Comrades Association, the PMFTU, the Malay Nationalist Party, Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (API), the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce, the Ceylon Tamils Association and, of course, the MIC.⁽⁶⁵⁾ It was a left oriented organization, being the leading spokesman of the non-Malay communities in alliance with radical Malays against the UMNO. On its formation in December 1946, the AMCJA had a pronounced inter-communal character, but later it became increasingly Chinese dominated. First, in January 1947, the Malay Nationalist Party and the Angkatan Pemuda Insaf withdrew from the coalition, after severe criticisms from the UMNO and the Malay Press that it was betraying Malay interests by aligning themselves with the Chinese.⁽⁶⁶⁾ Second, Thivy who could have been expected to command a senior position in the coalition, left for India in November 1946 to attend a meeting of the Indian National Congress.⁽⁶⁷⁾ The most senior MIC member of the AMCJA executive was A.N. Mitra, a colourless figure who was elected Treasurer.

(65) Jananayagam, 21 December 1946. Of the 400,000 members in the AMCJA, 300,000 belonged to the PMFTU.

(66) Yeo Kim Wah, 'The Anti-Federation Movement in Malaya', 1946-48', JSEAS, vol. IV, No. 1, March 1973, p. 39.

(67) Jananayagam, 23 December 1946. Though Yeo Kim Wah (Yeo Kim Wah, op.cit., p. 36) has suggested that John Eber or Lim Kean Chye of the Malayan Democratic Union may have been the principal source of inspiration behind the formation of the AMCJA as an inter-communal front against the Malayan Union, there is however some evidence that Thivy had earlier proposed such an inter-communal constitutional front but had not acted upon it and in fact left for India a few days after his proposal for such a conference - Jananayagam, 12 November 1946. The Majlis of 17 November 1946, considered Thivy's call for this conference as 'audacious, irresponsible and dangerous', in view of the fact that he was planning to leave for India, only days after 'meddling' in Malayan affairs.

The recommendations of the Anglo-Malay Working Committee were leaked in December 1946.⁽⁶⁸⁾ The Committee proposed the creation of a fully nominated Legislative Council, the separation of Singapore and a form of dual citizenship, without nationality.⁽⁶⁹⁾ Though the Indian Daily Mail dismissed the proposals as 'undemocratic, anti-national and retrograde',⁽⁷⁰⁾ however, according to the Department of Public Relations (not an unbiased source) Indians who were local-born or permanently domiciled were generally in favour of the new constitution.⁽⁷¹⁾ However the MIC rejected the Federation Agreement, as the Anglo-Malay proposals were known, at its first annual session in June 1947.⁽⁷²⁾ Radical Malay opinion, again typified by the Putera, also rejected the Agreement on the grounds that it was undemocratic, that dual citizenship would exacerbate communal differences, and that there was no recognition of Malay as the national language.⁽⁷³⁾ Indeed the Putera rejoined the AMCJA to agitate against the Federation proposals.⁽⁷⁴⁾

(68) Jananayagam, 23 December 1946.

(69) M.U. (Confidential) File 294/46, 'Constitutional Working Committee Report', pp. 7-10, (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(70) Indian Daily Mail, 24 July 1947.

(71) M.U. Public Relations Department File 565/47, Report by Acting Director of Public Relations, J.N. Mchugh, 29 August 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur). Indian Muslim organizations from Penang and Singapore made known their approval of the new constitution. Malaya Nanban, 22 July 1947.

(72) M.U. (Confidential) File 709/47, 'Situation Report', 16 June 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(73) Straits Times, 1 April 1947. After its withdrawal from the AMCJA in January 1947, the Malay Nationalist Party organized a coalition of Malay organizations. This coalition called the Putera (Pusat Tenaga Rakyat - Nucleus of People's Force) was inaugurated on 22 February 1947. Sunday Tribune, 23 February 1947.

(74) Stockwell, op.cit., pp. 170-180.

With regard to the Chinese community, the MCP, inevitably, rejected the Federation Agreement, again on the grounds that it was undemocratic. This was seen most clearly in the fact that the Legislative Council was wholly nominated by the High Commissioner.⁽⁷⁵⁾ Conservative Chinese, as represented by the Associated Chinese Chamber of Commerce had more pragmatic objectives; they feared that citizenship would be difficult to acquire and they saw in the separation of Singapore, a serious blow to commerce.⁽⁷⁶⁾ The Malayan Democratic Union, with its usual political acumen, recognised that the proposals only served to 'safeguard the privileged position of a small minority' comprising the élite of all races, Malay, Chinese, Indian and British.⁽⁷⁷⁾

In response to these criticisms, the Government established a Committee to consult non-Malay opinion on the constitutional issue.⁽⁷⁸⁾ The Committee, comprising five Europeans, two Chinese and two Indians had as its chairman, H.R. Cheeseman, the Director of Education. Since the Committee had only advisory powers, it was boycotted by the MIC and the two Indian members were dismissed by the Party, in a somewhat unoriginal phrase, as 'stooges of the British'.⁽⁷⁹⁾ However, other Indian groups and individuals took the opportunity to make their views known to the Committee. For example, a leading Indian lawyer, R. Ramani,

(75) Jananayagam, 22 March 1947.

(76) Straits Times, 25 March 1947.

(77) Straits Times, 3 February 1948 - 'Pro-Malay Nonsense', 12 February 1948 - 'Anglo-Malay Poison'.

(78) Constitutional Proposals for Malaya: Report of the Consultative Committee together with proceedings of six public meetings, a summary of representations made and letters and memoranda considered by the Committee, Kuala Lumpur, 21 March 1947.

(79) Tamil Nesan, 2 January 1947. The two Indian representatives on the Committee were M.L.R. Doraisamy, an Indian Councillor on the Malayan Union Advisory Council, and C.P.R. Menon, President of the Malacca Regional Indian Congress.

though criticizing the citizenship provisions, argued that the 'unimpeachable rights of the Malays to have priority in the politics of their country', should be accepted by all.⁽⁸⁰⁾ The Penang Muslim League pressed the Committee for special consideration of Indian Muslim interests, including separate representation, on the grounds that there were irreconcilable differences between Hindu and Muslim Indians in Malaya.⁽⁸¹⁾ This in turn led to agitations from Pakistani Muslims and then Sikhs for separate representation.⁽⁸²⁾

In early 1947 the MIC found itself in conflict over the constitutional issue, not only with other important Indian groups, but also with its allies in the AMCJA-Putera coalition. From the formation of the coalition in December 1946, the MIC had been regarded as troublesome by the other members. First, there had been strong Indian pressure for Thivy to be elected President of the coalition, though this move collapsed when Thivy left, temporarily, for India.⁽⁸³⁾ When the MIC had to be content with the election of A.N. Mitra as Treasurer, John Eber of the Malayan Democratic Union, expected the MIC to withdraw.⁽⁸⁴⁾ Second, the Malayan Democratic Union was disenchanted with the MIC because the latter refused to accept the oath of exclusive allegiance to Malaya, and also acted as though it were indispensable to the AMCJA.⁽⁸⁵⁾ Third, the Malay Nationalist Party was irritated

(80) Warta Negara, 31 January 1947.

(81) Sevika, 2 January 1947.

(82) Malayan Daily News, 28 January 1947; Malay Mail, 1 February 1947; Tamil Nesan, 12 February 1947; Sevika, 2 September 1947.

(83) Yeo Kim Wah, op.cit., p. 37.

(84) Ibid.

(85) Straits Times, 22 December 1946. See also Yeo Kim Wah, op.cit., p. 37.

by the MIC's strident and uncompromising attitude on the importance of democratic rights.⁽⁸⁶⁾ It was particularly annoying for the MIC's allies to have the Indian National Congress and Nehru constantly promoted as the leader of the anti-imperial struggle throughout Asia. This disenchantment with the MIC was made clear by John Eber in a letter to Tan Cheng Lock:

Do not hesitate to silence speakers (during meetings) who hold the floor too long Be particularly on your guard with Indian speakers whose voice as I have said, although loud, is not important and see to it that the speakers of the General Labour Union, whose voice though not loud is very important, are listened to with respect and attention.⁽⁸⁷⁾

Despite these disagreements, Thivy played an important part in the drafting of the People's Constitutional Proposals to be presented by the AMCJA.⁽⁸⁸⁾ This called for the granting of independence to Malaya (including Singapore), the establishment of a fully elected Legislative Council with fifty-five per cent Malay representation for nine years, the creation of a Council of Races to safeguard all against discrimination and the adoption of Malay as the official language.⁽⁸⁹⁾ In early 1947, in response to the Malay Nationalist Party's pressure, the AMCJA added to the proposed constitution the following clauses; that the Malay rulers would be recognised as constitutional rulers; that Malay religion and custom would be protected under the Sultans; that Malay special rights would be safeguarded; and that Melayu nationality would provide the basis for citizenship for all the peoples of Malaya.⁽⁹⁰⁾

(86) Indian Daily Mail, 27 December 1946.

(87) Letter from John Eber to Tan Cheng Lock, 31 December 1946 (Tan Cheng Lock Papers) cited in Yeo Kim Wah, *op.cit.*, p. 38.

(88) 'The History of the Congress Association in the Constitutional Issue', p. 9 (Thivy Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(89) The Peoples Constitutional Proposals for Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, November 1947, pp. 46-47; Malaya Tribune, 11 July 1947.

(90) Malaya Tribune, 16 December 1947; Yeo Kim Wah, *op.cit.*, p. 46.

The MIC objected particularly strongly to this last proposal and insisted that citizenship should be on the basis of Malaysian, not Melayu nationality.⁽⁹¹⁾ They also argued that the Malays should receive only forty-eight seats in the Legislative Council, instead of the one hundred and seventeen which the AMCJA had suggested.⁽⁹²⁾ By voicing these objections, the MIC finally lost all favour with the Malay Nationalist Party. Indeed by September 1947, the MIC had become so estranged from the coalition that it was not even given a copy of the People's Constitution, though it had already appeared in the Malayan press.⁽⁹³⁾

Sensing the irritation within the AMCJA against the MIC, Malcolm Macdonald, in June 1947, attempted to persuade Thivy to pull the Party out of the coalition.⁽⁹⁴⁾ Macdonald sensed that the MIC's enthusiasm for the AMCJA was cooling, principally because in mid-1947, Indian attention was focused on the sub-continent where independence was

(91) Amended Proposals by the MIC to the Draft of the New Constitution for Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, n.d. (Thivy Papers), also cited in Yeo Kim Wah, op.cit., p. 48, footnote 78. Tan Cheng Lock too faced criticisms from the Chinese community over this concept of Melayu nationality. In a letter dated 7 October 1947, to Gerald de Cruz, Liaison Officer of the AMCJA, Tan Cheng Lock said, 'They (Chinese) are all opposed to their losing their racial individuality, culture and independence by calling themselves Melayu' (Tan Cheng Lock Papers, ISEAS Singapore).

(92) Amended Proposals by the MIC to the Draft of the New Constitution for Malaya. The one hundred and seventeen seats represented fifty-five per cent of the seats in the proposed Legislative Council.

(93) Letter from Budh Singh to the AMCJA-Putera, 16 September 1947 (Tan Cheng Lock Papers, Singapore); also cited in Yeo Kim Wah, op.cit., p. 48, footnote 78. The 'People's Constitutional Proposals', was completed on 10 August 1947 - see Minutes of Third Delegates Conference of the AMCJA-Putera, 3 November 1947 (Tan Cheng Lock Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(94) Indian Daily Mail, 20 June 1947.

imminent. Macdonald's advice went unheeded.⁽⁹⁵⁾ The position of the MIC in the AMCJA became almost untenable as a result of the hartal of 20 October 1947. When the Party supported the one-day general strike, conservative Indian businessmen withdrew their support from it.⁽⁹⁶⁾ They were already disgruntled by the fact that the MIC had, despite its earlier vigorous objections, compromised on the issue of Melayu citizenship and that it had not fought for dual citizenship.⁽⁹⁷⁾

However there was still substantial Indian support for the AMCJA, principally from Penang, Singapore and parts of Selangor.⁽⁹⁸⁾ On the other hand, according to an opinion poll carried out in October 1947 by the Malayan Information Department, Indians in Johore, were in general in favour of the Federation proposals and therefore opposed the AMCJA's stand.⁽⁹⁹⁾ The poll also indicated that in Negri Sembilan, Indians and Ceylonese were found to be more interested in developments on the sub-continent.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ The hartal of 20 October 1947 was called by the AMCJA to demonstrate opposition to the Federation Agreement. It revealed the very serious weaknesses within the MIC over the constitution issue. The hartal

(95) Ibid.

(96) Tamil Nesan, 30 October 1947. For example, the Selangor Indian Chamber of Commerce argued that 'it is not the intention of the mercantile community to meddle in the internal affairs of this country and its Constitutional Proposals ... We are here as mere Indian citizens. We are here as a trading community'. M.U. (Confidential) File 77/46, 'Materials for Local Affairs Talk', 20 October 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(97) Tamil Nesan, 30 October 1947.

(98) Tamil Murasu, 22 October 1947.

(99) M.U. Information Department File 703/47, 'Situation Report', 11 October 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur). It should be noted that this opinion poll was carried out before the hartal of 20 October 1947.

(100) Ibid.

was most successful in the main cities - Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Ipoh and Penang - though in the rural areas, Indian estate labourers, organized by the PMFTU, also stopped work, whilst many Chinese and Indian shopkeepers, under the threat of intimidation closed their businesses.⁽¹⁰¹⁾

Within the Indian community, opposition to the hartal came mainly from the Muslims. The Penang Muslim League instructed local businessmen to ignore the day of action and to support the UMNO.⁽¹⁰²⁾ In Johore Bharu and Selangor too, Indian Muslim businessmen defied the boycott.⁽¹⁰³⁾ Though the Indian Chamber of Commerce of Malaya, comprised of Muslims, Sindhis, Punjabis and a few Tamils considered the constitutional issue of little importance to it, it was forced by threats of intimidation, to advise its members to support the hartal.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ The success of the hartal in Singapore was due mainly to the support of the Indian municipal labourers.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ But in general, the success of the hartal was limited by the non-cooperation of the Associated Chinese Chamber of Commerce. This was a rather conservative body, interested only in those clauses of the Constitution which would affect their business - that is, citizenship and the degree of Chinese representation in the Legislative Council.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ Whereas in early 1947 these reservations were sufficient to cause the Associated Chinese Chamber of Commerce to boycott the Federal Legislative Council, by the end of the year it was prepared to give it limited cooperation.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾

(101) Malaya Tribune, 24 October 1947; M.U. Labour Department File 517/47, enclosure (13), Labour Department Monthly Report for October 1947; M.U. Labour Department File 93/47, Memorandum from Deputy Commissioner for Labour, Kedah, to Commissioner for Labour, Malayan Union, 10 November 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(102) Malaya Tribune, 24 October 1947.

(103) Tamil Nesan, 25 October 1947.

(104) Straits Times, 30 October 1947.

(105) Jananayagam, 1 November 1947. Out of a total of 8,000 municipal workers, approximately 5,500 observed the hartal. Of these, 3,300 were Indians.

(106) Straits Times, 12 November 1947.

(107) Ibid.

By early 1948 the enthusiasm of the MIC for the constitutional agitations was waning, not least because it was constantly under attack in the Malay papers.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ In particular, the Majlis emphasized the inability of the MIC to influence strongly Malaya's political future because the majority of its members were non-Federal citizens.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ It also played on the differing ethnic objectives within the community and indeed when the UMNO introduced associate membership in 1949, a number of Sikhs, Ceylon Tamils and Indian Muslims joined the Party.⁽¹¹⁰⁾ But these defections from the MIC, and the general weariness of the Party, did not prevent it from embarking upon an eventually futile boycott of the Federation Agreement between 1948 and 1950.

(ii)

The Federation Agreement, which had been derived initially from the negotiations which took place between the British, the Sultans and the UMNO from July 1947 following the collapse of the Malayan Union, came into effect on 1 February 1948.⁽¹¹¹⁾ It recognised 'the Rulers as sovereign monarchs with the prerogatives, power and jurisdiction which they enjoyed prior to the Japanese Occupation'.⁽¹¹²⁾ It also endorsed British postwar policy of preparing the Federation for eventual self-government, but postponed the introduction of an elected assembly

(108) Majlis, 12 December 1947, 14 December 1947, 19 December 1947.

(109) Majlis, 12 December 1947.

(110) Tamil Nesan, 30 May 1949.

(111) Great Britain, Colonial Office, Federation of Malaya: Summary of Revised Constitutional Proposals, Cmd. 7171, London, 1947.

(112) Ibid., p. 5.

'until conditions were more suitable'.⁽¹¹³⁾ Under the new Constitution, the High Commissioner governed the country with full powers, including the right to veto legislation.⁽¹¹⁴⁾ He was assisted by an Advisory Executive Council comprised of seven officials and five to seven unofficials. The Federal Legislative Council comprised fifty unofficials, fourteen officials and eleven 'free' members.⁽¹¹⁵⁾ Ethnically the Council was divided into thirty-one Malay members, twenty-one Europeans, fifteen Chinese and seven others. All members were nominated.

Under the new Constitution, citizenship (without nationality) was granted automatically to the following :⁽¹¹⁶⁾

- 1) the subjects of the Sultans, that is, the Malays.
- 2) those born in the Malay States of parents who themselves had been born in the Malay States and who had resided there for fifteen years.
- 3) those born in the Federation who spoke Malay and conformed to Malay custom

(113) The Federation of Malaya Agreement, 1948, reprinted 1952 with amendments, Kuala Lumpur, 1952, p. 2.

(114) Ibid., p. 23.

(115) The eleven 'free' members were the nine Mentris Besar of the State Councils and the two representatives of Penang and Malacca, who were free to vote as they wished.

(116) Malayan Union, Constitutional Proposals for Malaya: Report of the Working Committee appointed by a Conference of His Excellency the Governor of the Malayan Union, Their Highnesses the Rulers of the Malay States and the representatives of the United Malays National Organization, 1946, p. 66 (Article 128 of the 'Draft Federation Agreement') cited in Ratnam, op.cit., p. 76. The citizenship provisions of the Federation Agreement of 1948 were almost identical with those of the Working Committee. The only two amendments made were:- 1) That for British subjects born in Penang or Malacca, permanent residence in the Federation was sufficient for citizenship acquisition; 2) automatic citizenship would also be conferred on any person born before 1 February 1948, and who spoke Malay or conformed to Malay custom. (Federation of Malaya Agreement, 1948, Article 124, clause (d), cited in Ratnam, op.cit., pp. 81-82.

- 4) British subjects born in Penang and Malacca who were permanent residents in the Federation
- 5) British subjects born in the Malay States, whose fathers were born there or who had completed a minimum of fifteen years' residence.
- 6) British subjects born in the Malay States, whose fathers were Federal citizens at the time of the former's birth.

In practice these regulations ensured that all Malays and Indonesians qualified for citizenship, while the 'place of birth' and residential requirements severely curtailed the numbers of non-Malays who could acquire citizenship. The non-Malays were further disadvantaged by the need to pass an English or Malay language test.

The MIC's objections to these citizenship proposals have already been fully documented. In 1948 the Party argued that Malaya was a multi-racial country, not a Malay country, and consequently that there should be a common citizenship (with nationality) with equal rights for all races.⁽¹¹⁷⁾ Throughout 1947, the MIC as a member of the AMCJA had campaigned against these revised proposals and even after the demise of the coalition in April 1948 the MIC continued to boycott the Federal and State Councils which had been established under the Federation Agreement. However there were individuals, some within the MIC, who were prepared to cooperate with the Government and accept nominations to Federal, State and Settlement Councils: indeed there were five Indian representatives in the Federal Legislative Council alone.⁽¹¹⁸⁾ As the MIC had passed a resolution at its annual session in March 1948 in

(117) 'The History of the Congress Association in the Constitutional Issue', p. 9 (Thivy Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(118) P.P. Narayanan and M.P. Rajagopal were Indian Labour representatives on the Federal Legislative Council; S.O.K. Ubaidullah represented the Indian Chamber of Commerce while R. Ramani and V.M.N. Menon represented the general Indian community.

favour of a Constitutional boycott, it was inevitable that the Party would expel those members who accepted Government nominations.⁽¹¹⁹⁾ Ten such members were expelled in April 1948.⁽¹²⁰⁾

However the boycott policy was strongly opposed by a number of important MIC branches. In March 1948 the Malacca Regional Indian Congress advised the MIC to leave the AMCJA and pursue a policy of limited cooperation with the Government.⁽¹²¹⁾ At a meeting of the Congress working committee the following July, it again pressed for the abandonment of the boycott.⁽¹²²⁾ The Malacca resolution was defeated and the branch executive committee resigned in protest.⁽¹²³⁾ With the re-election of Budh Singh, the architect of the boycott policy, as President of the MIC at the same meeting, the policy was confirmed. However with the declaration of the Emergency, a complete constitutional boycott could be interpreted as supporting, however indirectly, the Communist revolt. Therefore, the MIC announced that, though it still opposed the Federation Agreement, it would contest elections to town councils and rural boards which had been established prior to the Agreement.⁽¹²⁴⁾

(119) Indian Daily Mail, 6 March 1948.

(120) Ibid., 12 April 1948.

(121) Ibid., 6 March 1948.

(122) Tamil Murasu, 5 July 1948; Minutes of the second annual session of the MIC Working Committee, Kuala Lumpur, 3 July 1948 (MIC Papers); Tamil Nesan, 12 March 1948.

(123) Tamil Murasu, 5 July 1948.

(124) Tamil Murasu, 2 August 1948; Malaya Tribune, 3 August 1948.

In Singapore the pace of constitutional development was more rapid. The Elections Ordinance, introduced in April 1948, conferred universal adult suffrage on all British subjects of 'sound mind and character, resident in the island for a year preceding elections'.⁽¹²⁵⁾ As the result of pressure from the Malayan Democratic Union and the Malay Nationalist Party, the franchise was later extended to include British protected subjects born in the Federation.⁽¹²⁶⁾ Since the majority of foreign-born Indians in Singapore were British subjects, whereas the foreign-born Chinese were predominantly alien, it followed that Indians constituted the largest proportion of the electorate in the Chinese-dominated island.⁽¹²⁷⁾ This provided an opportunity for an electoral advantage which the Singapore Regional Indian Congress was loathe to ignore. When elections to the Singapore Municipal and Legislative Councils were announced, factions within the MIC branch, ignored the boycott policy and made plans to contest the elections.⁽¹²⁸⁾

R. Jumabhoy, President of the Singapore Regional Indian Congress, was already an unofficial member of the Singapore Advisory Council. At the first annual session of the MIC in June 1947, some delegates had demanded that such members as Jumabhoy should resign from their Government positions to demonstrate their support for MIC policy.⁽¹²⁹⁾ Thivy refused to submit to these demands but at the same time assured the Party that these Councillors would not act in any way 'detrimental

(125) Text of Governor's Despatch, 11 March 1948, cited in Yeo Kim Wah, Political Development In Singapore, 1945-1955, p. 252.

(126) Yeo Kim Wah, op.cit., p. 252.

(127) Ibid., p. 255.

(128) Tamil Murasu, 19 April 1947.

(129) Indian Daily Mail, 9 July 1947.

to the real interests of Indians in Malaya or against the policy of the MIC'.⁽¹³⁰⁾ But immediately following this, V.M.N. Menon, the Indian representative on the Malayan Union Advisory Council and an MIC official, voted against a motion in the Council which proposed the abolition of toddy shops.⁽¹³¹⁾ Since the MIC had long agitated for this measure, Menon was clearly challenging the Party. An MIC Board of Inquiry later found him guilty of defying Party policy and he was expelled.⁽¹³²⁾

Menon was swiftly followed by Jumabhoy. In July 1947 Jumabhoy voted in the Singapore Advisory Council in favour of separate elections to the Singapore Legislative Council.⁽¹³³⁾ This was clearly in defiance of MIC policy which aimed at a united Malaya. It was at this point that Jumabhoy also announced that the Singapore Regional Indian Congress would contest the Municipal and Legislative Council elections, and immediately began to register Singapore Congress members on the electoral roll.⁽¹³⁴⁾ Denunciation came swiftly. The Indian Daily Mail declared that the decision of the Singapore Congress was 'tantamount to an utter reversal of the declared policy of the parent body'.⁽¹³⁵⁾ Jumabhoy was also attacked in the Tamil Murasu and the Tamil Nesan, the latter arguing that he should resign from the Singapore Regional Indian Congress and contest the election as a candidate of the Indian Chamber of Commerce.⁽¹³⁶⁾ At a meeting of the working committee of

(130) Ibid.

(131) Malayan Union Advisory Council Proceedings, 9 June 1947, B.102.

(132) Tamil Murasu, 28 August 1947.

(133) Indian Daily Mail, 9 July 1947; 18 July 1947.

(134) Ibid., 18 July 1947.

(135) Ibid., 19 July 1947.

(136) Tamil Murasu, 17 July 1947; Tamil Nesan, 24 August 1947.

the MIC, the Selangor branch called for disciplinary action against the Singapore Congress.⁽¹³⁷⁾ Jumabhoy did not wait for expulsion. He resigned from the Party on 16 October 1947, wildly accusing the MIC of allowing itself to be dominated by Ceylonese and Pakistanis.⁽¹³⁸⁾ He was subsequently nominated unopposed to the Singapore Legislative Council by the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce.

The Singapore Congress justified its participation in the elections on the following grounds. First, that the MIC had not passed a formal resolution to boycott elections.⁽¹³⁹⁾ Second, that the Malayan Democratic Union, an active member of the AMCJA, had already announced that it would contest the elections in Singapore.⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ In reply the President of the MIC argued that a boycott was essential for the following reasons. First, that separate elections for Singapore would be contrary to the Party's objective of securing a united Malaya.⁽¹⁴¹⁾ Second, that since the MIC demanded a fully elected assembly, the elections to the Singapore Legislature (where only six of the twenty-three seats were to be contested) were insufficiently democratic.⁽¹⁴²⁾ Third, that as the MIC insisted on citizenship based on undivided loyalty to Malaya, it could not accept the elections in Singapore where the franchise was based on British nationality.⁽¹⁴³⁾

(137) Indian Daily Mail, 4 August 1947.

(138) Tamil Nesan, 17 October 1947.

(139) The Singapore Regional Indian Congress interpreted the resolution passed at the emergency session of the MIC in March 1948 with regard to a Constitutional boycott as binding only on nominations to official posts, and not pertaining to elections for Councils. Tamil Murasu, 26 April 1948.

(140) Indian Daily Mail, 29 July 1947. In fact, the Malayan Democratic Union reversed its decision of May 1947 to participate in elections, because of pressure from the Malay Nationalist Party and the Singapore Press - Yeo Kim Wah, op.cit., p. 261.

(141) Tamil Nesan, 9 September 1947; Straits Times, 19 September 1947; Indian Daily Mail, 20 September 1947.

(142) Tamil Nesan, 9 September 1947; Straits Times, 19 September 1947.

(143) Indian Daily Mail, 20 September 1947.

The MIC decided that it would have 'nothing to do with a form of political skull-duggery which promises to hold out the shadow of democracy but actually denies the very core and substance of it.'⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ In April 1948, it expelled the two members of the Singapore Regional Indian Congress who had contested the elections.⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ In August the same year, the MIC slightly relaxed its boycott in Singapore, when it directed the local branch to contest the municipal and rural elections.⁽¹⁴⁶⁾ It justified this on the grounds that these councils were not integral parts of the Constitution.⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ In reality, the MIC's slight change of policy was due to an awareness that a complete constitutional boycott by the Party could be misinterpreted during the period of insurgency. The MIC was acutely aware that earlier it had been closely involved with left-wing parties which after June 1948 had been proscribed. Therefore it took care to 'disassociate itself from violence in any shape or form'.⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ At the same time Budh Singh emphasized that the partial truce with the Government should not be interpreted as a defeat for the Party's stand.⁽¹⁴⁹⁾ The MIC, he reiterated, had not 'lost sight of her ideals in general and objectives in particular, namely, self-government for Malaya as an indivisible nation'.⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ By announcing its willingness to participate in local elections, whilst continuing to boycott the Legislative Council, the MIC was in effect salving its conscience whilst saving its skin.

(144) Ibid.

(145) Ibid., 12 April 1948. The two members were V.P. Abdullah and Mrs. V. Malathi.

(146) Malaya Tribune, 3 August 1948.

(147) Ibid.

(148) Ibid.

(149) Ibid.

(150) Ibid.

However some sections of the Indian community in Singapore argued that the full boycott should be maintained. The Indian Daily Mail and the Tamil Murasu, for example, argued that by participating in the municipal elections, the Singapore Congress would excite communal tension.⁽¹⁵¹⁾ With the resignation of Jumabhoy from the MIC in August 1947, those factions in the Singapore branch, who were in favour of a complete boycott were able to gain dominance. In December 1948 the Singapore Congress reversed its earlier policy and announced that henceforth it would boycott all elections.⁽¹⁵²⁾ The result was an open rift within the branch, with certain factions continuing to prepare electoral campaigns.⁽¹⁵³⁾ In frustration Congress members began to drift towards non-communal parties on the island.

There can be little doubt that the boycott policy severely weakened the MIC. Most importantly, with the expulsion from the Party of Indian Councillors who accepted Government positions under the Federation Agreement, the MIC lost those powerful members who had exercised a moderating influence on the leadership. Moreover as they left the Party they took with them the support of those sections of the community who were themselves becoming increasingly disenchanted with the MIC and its policies.⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ In addition, large sections of the mercantile community, a significant source of finance for the MIC, were alienated by the Party's 'extremist policies'.⁽¹⁵⁵⁾

(151) Tamil Murasu, 12 March 1948; Indian Daily Mail, 12 April 1948.

(152) Tamil Murasu, 22 December 1948.

(153) *Ibid.*, 16 February 1949.

(154) Tamil Nesan, 12 March 1948.

(155) *Ibid.*

Agitations within the Party to abandon the boycott, such agitation which had been rife within the Singapore Regional Indian Congress from as early as August 1947, soon took hold within branches on the mainland. Most prominent here was the Selangor branch and its President from December 1949, S. Athinahappan, who was also editor of the Tamil Nesan. Athinahappan used his press position to campaign for a policy of cooperation with the Government. He argued that the Malays were opposed to immediate independence on the grounds that it would lead to their domination by the Chinese and Indians.⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ As a result, by boycotting the Constitution and demanding independence for Malaya, the Indians were engaged in a futile exercise, the only result of which would be to antagonize the Malays.⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ The Indian community in Malaya would have to accept that its future was 'inextricably bound up with that of the Malays and the Chinese'.⁽¹⁵⁸⁾ Athinahappan further pointed out that the partners of the MIC in the AMCJA were now participating in the Federal and State Councils.⁽¹⁵⁹⁾ They were pursuing a constructive policy as was, in a sense, the MCP when it decided to embark on open insurrection against the Government's Constitutional policies. A Constitutional boycott was negative: it left the MIC drifting.

The MIC position was further threatened by the emergence of new organizations purporting to represent Indian political interests. Most notable here was the Federation of Indian Organizations, formed by Indian Councillors who, on being expelled from the MIC, were seeking a new political base.⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ However, the Federation of Indian

(156) Ibid., 25 September 1949.

(157) Ibid.

(158) Indian Daily Mail, 10 May 1950.

(159) Ibid., 25 December 1949.

(160) See Chapter VI, pp. 212-214; Indian Daily Mail, 19 April 1950.

Organizations remained elitist and limited in appeal. The formation of the Malayan Chinese Association in 1949, in which Tan Cheng Lock played a leading role, was a decisive blow against the policy of the MIC.

Tan Cheng Lock had been President of the AMCJA. He had been the architect of the coalition's opposition to the Federation Agreement. With the demise of the AMCJA in mid-1948, Tan Cheng Lock worked for the establishment of the MCA as a party which would co-operate fully with the Government.⁽¹⁶¹⁾ Whilst the MIC was expelling Indian Councillors from the Party, the MCA granted automatic membership to those in the Chinese community who had received Government nominations.⁽¹⁶²⁾

The MIC was isolated. For example, with the formation of the Communities Liaison Committee in January 1949, the Government failed to appoint an Indian representative.⁽¹⁶³⁾ Later in the year when M.N. Cumarasamy, a South Indian Tamil, was nominated by the Government for this Committee, his name did not appear in official communiques. In early 1950, when the Government announced its intention of forming a cabinet composed of representatives from each of the communities, the exclusion of the Indian community from constitutional advance became a real possibility.

That the MIC clung so tenaciously, and with such futility, to the boycott policy was due essentially to one man - the President, Budh Singh. He was a man of strong, extreme beliefs, incapable of compromise, unwilling to reassess and reflect. At the 1948 annual session of the MIC, the anti-boycott Malacca branch attempted to oust

(161) Straits Times, 28 February 1949.

(162) The MCA Constitution stated that 'the Chinese members of the Legislative and Executive Councils would automatically become officers of the Association'. See G.P. Means, Malaysian Politics, London, 1970, p. 120.

(163) See Chapter V, p. 143.

Budh Singh but, with the support of powerful factions in Selangor, Penang and Singapore, he successfully defended his position.⁽¹⁶⁴⁾ Two years later the anti-boycott, anti-Budh Singh feelings within the Party were much stronger.⁽¹⁶⁵⁾ In April 1950, he was replaced by K. Ramanathan, whose first act as President was to abandon the boycott. In his first Presidential speech he declared that henceforth the MIC would participate in the working of the Constitution and 'by so doing expose its inadequacies and demand a real and substantial political advance'.⁽¹⁶⁶⁾

Predictably there was opposition to the change. It did not escape the attention of the Indian Daily Mail that in the same month that the British Government had announced plans for the formation of a representative Cabinet, the MIC had abandoned its Constitutional boycott.⁽¹⁶⁷⁾ The Paper also drew attention to the fact that the fourth annual session of the Party had been dominated by the merchant class, as shown by the fact that the Accounts Bill, which severely threatened the interest of Indian merchants, had prompted perhaps the most committed discussion.⁽¹⁶⁸⁾ Ramanathan, the new President, was also Secretary of the All Malaya Chettians Chamber of Commerce. The Indian Daily Mail was supported by the Singapore Regional Indian Congress, which had earlier been such a ferocious critic of the boycott.⁽¹⁶⁹⁾ The Singapore branch,

(164) Tamil Nesan, 5 July 1948.

(165) See letter from A. Balakrishnan to S. Govindaraj, 25 December 1953 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(166) Presidential Address by K. Ramanathan at the fourth annual session of the MIC, 29-30 April 1950 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(167) Indian Daily Mail, 4 May 1950.

(168) Ibid., 12 May 1950.

(169) Ibid., 5 May 1950.

depleted by the defection of moderate members following the resignation of Jumabhoy, was, by 1950, merely a radical rump. They feared that the ending of the boycott implied the emergence of communal politics and communal bargaining. They wished to be left out.

The decision in 1950 to abandon the Constitutional boycott was clearly a triumph of political reality over idealism within the Indian community. Even so, the successful re-engagement of the community in formal politics in Malaya was to prove difficult to achieve. It was to take some four years before the Indian community securely positioned itself in Malaya's political establishment.

Indian Participation In Politics: Political Reform
And The Indian Response.

(i)

The nature and extent of Indian participation in formal politics throughout the period under study was determined to a large extent by the changing Malayan political infrastructure. Immediately after the Occupation the scope for formal politics was limited essentially to advisory councils. These were introduced by the British in 1945 to 'bring into consultation the various communities in the country and to seek their advice on the problems which face the administration'.⁽¹⁾ The councils were composed almost entirely of the wealthy and English-educated, who were noted for their cordial relations with the British administrators. Tan Cheng Lock and E.E.C. Thuraisingham were typical of this group.⁽²⁾

The British Military Administration Advisory Council, established in late 1945, contained seven Indians, of whom four were professionals, two were businessmen and one an estate clerk.⁽³⁾ The Malayan Union Advisory Council, established in 1946, was dominated by Doraisamy Iyer, a lawyer and by H.H. Abdoolcader, who had been a councillor in the pre-war years. Neither had been involved in the Indian Independence League.⁽⁴⁾

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- (1) M.U. File 164/46, Speech by Deputy Chief Civil Affairs Officer for Negri Sembilan Advisory Council, September 1945 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).
- (2) Malcolm Macdonald later referred to E.E.C. Thuraisingham as 'one of the most influential and trusted leaders in Malaya'. Indian Daily Mail, 6 October 1951.
- (3) M.U. (Confidential) File 325/46, Report by Deputy Director, Malayan Security Service, 18 June 1946 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).
- (4) Ibid.

V.M.N. Menon, M.P. Rajagopal and later P.P. Narayanan were Trade Union representatives on the Council and could be described as the only members with lower middle-class origins. Hence the councils were filled mainly from the upper classes though great care was taken to ensure that all Indian groups - merchants, Muslims, Hindus and workers - were represented. However ethnic suspicions within the community were so powerful that not all interests were satisfied. For example in Singapore in 1947, Tamil merchants, annoyed that Indian mercantile interests were represented by a North Indian, R.N. Jumabhoy, petitioned the authorities for separate Tamil merchant representation.⁽⁵⁾

It is apparent that the Indian representatives on the councils commanded little support throughout the whole community. This militated against the rise of a responsible leadership, acceptable to the authorities and to the Indian community as a whole. This 'elite' was, to use Professor H.J. Benda's terminology, a 'modernizing, traditional elite'.⁽⁶⁾ However its role as an innovating force was limited by its restricted rapport with the Indian masses and even with the major political groups within Indian society. For example, in June 1947 V.M.N. Menon voted in the Federal Legislative Council against the abolition of toddy shops, a motion introduced by S.B. Palmer.⁽⁷⁾ Since the MIC had embarked on a temperance programme in 1946, Menon was clearly out of step with opinion in the Indian community. The furore this action provoked, eventually led to Menon's dismissal from the MIC.⁽⁸⁾ In 1948

(5) M.U. File 175/46, Vols. I and II, Singapore Advisory Council Proceedings, 17 April 1947 (N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(6) For an excellent study of leadership in directly-ruled and indirectly-ruled colonial territories, see H.J. Benda, 'Political élites in colonial Southeast Asia: an historical analysis', Comparative Studies in Society and History, Vol. 7, April 1965, pp. 233-251.

(7) Malayan Union Advisory Council Proceedings, 9 June 1947, B100-102; Indian Daily Mail, 10 June 1947.

(8) Tamil Nesan, 26 August 1947.

political opinion in the Indian community favoured a boycott of the councils, because they were felt to be unrepresentative and to retard the political advancement of the country. While this campaign for a Constitutional boycott gathered momentum, the Indian representatives stubbornly clung to their positions.⁽⁹⁾ In other words though the MIC attempted to project itself as the spokesman for the Indian community, it was unable to engage the energies of the Indian councillors.

However it should also be noted that the elites themselves were deeply concerned about their unrepresentative character. For example in March 1951, R. Ramani, who typified this elite, declined an invitation to become a Cabinet member because he feared that acceptance would lead to accusations within the community that he was hungry for power.⁽¹⁰⁾ Certainly his acceptance would have split the Indian community. Moreover the Indian representatives on these councils were occasionally confused as to whether they represented Indian interests or occupational interests. This ambivalence can be illustrated by the resignation of P.P. Narayanan and M.P. Rajagopal from the Federal Legislative Council in October 1953 in protest against the absence of an Indian in the enlarged Cabinet.⁽¹¹⁾ As Indians they felt obliged to resign; as trade union representatives the issue did not affect them. Their decision to follow the dictates of race sparked off a serious controversy within the Selangor and Penang branches of the Labour Party.⁽¹²⁾

(9) See chapter IV, pp. 129,133. Indian Daily Mail, 12 April 1948. Ten council members were expelled from the MIC in April 1948 for opposing the constitutional boycott policy of the MIC.

(10) Indian Daily Mail, 14 March 1951.

(11) Singapore Tiger Standard, 13 October 1953.

(12) Ibid. For further details of this controversy, see pp. 149-152.

The representatives were also confronted with the dilemma of reconciling their community's welfare with British policy, while simultaneously safeguarding their own nominated positions. They could not act as spokesmen for their community whilst that community viewed them with deep suspicion and whilst they owed their position to the colonial regime. This system of representation encouraged the emergence of an Indian elite who shared the conservatism and pro-British loyalties of their counterparts in the other communities. This had two consequences. First, the Indian councillors worked with the Malay and Chinese representatives in the Independence of Malaya Party (IMP) and the so-called Radical Party of Penang, and thereby helped to bring moderate Indian political opinion into these multi-racial organizations.⁽¹³⁾ Second, the Indian councillors sought a base in Indian society.⁽¹⁴⁾

In the early 1950s, finding the struggle against the Communist revolt an increasing strain, the British tried to foster the growth of moderate multi-racial parties, most notably the IMP, as a counterpoise to the MCP. Here they could rely upon the support of the conservative elites. Indians formed the backbone of the IMP, though the founder and leader was Dato Onn.⁽¹⁵⁾ However this Indian elite became increasingly aware of their lack of support within their community and in July 1950 formed the Federation of Indian Organisations in an attempt to mobilize the existing Indian organizations under their leadership.⁽¹⁶⁾ But the councillors failed to attract mass support; they even failed to influence political and ideological developments in their community.

(13) Indian Councillors in the IMP included E.E.C. Thuraisingham, R. Ramani and P.P. Narayanan. Dr. N.K. Menon, a Councillor from Penang, remained active in the Radical Party of Penang in the early 1950s and was responsible for attracting Indian professional groups into the Party's ranks. See R.K. Vasil, Politics In A Plural Society: A Study of non-communal political parties in Malaysia, London, 1971, pp. 50-55, 80, 99.

(14) See chapter VI, pp. 212-214.

(15) Vasil, op.cit., p. 59.

(16) Indian Daily Mail, 26 July 1950.

It is ironic that many of these councillors who often sought associate membership to the UMNO in the late 1940s were bitter critics of the MIC when it joined the Alliance in 1954.⁽¹⁷⁾ Political experience on the councils does not seem to have bred in them political wisdom. With respect to Singapore, when mass parties began to emerge in the mid-1950s, this elite was predictably discredited as being 'colonial stooges'.⁽¹⁸⁾ Their career in the councils destroyed their political future. R. Jumabhoy, N. Mallal and M.J. Namazie were all left stranded as the tide of politics turned inexorably against them.⁽¹⁹⁾

(ii)

Though the outbreak of the Communist revolt in June 1948 was immediately followed by political repression, it was soon evident that repression could not contain the Communist threat and that a political initiative was urgently required to reverse the deteriorating situation. In 1949 Henry Gurney, the High Commissioner, encouraged the formation

(17) Ibid., 12 September 1949. V.M.N. Menon, S.O.K. Ubaidullah, R. Ramani, P.P. Narayanan and E.E.C. Thuraisingham were associate members of the UMNO in 1949. For more details on the MIC-Alliance controversy see chapter VII, pp. 244-245.

(18) Yeo Kim Wah, Political Development in Singapore, 1945-55, Singapore, 1973, p. 101, footnote 42.

(19) R. Jumabhoy, born in India; businessman; Municipal Councillor, 1938-48; Member, Executive Council, Singapore; President, Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce, 1949-50; President, Singapore Indian Association, 1949-52. Served on various committees of the Legislative Council.

N.A. Mallal, born in Pakistan; educated in London University; lawyer; Municipal Councillor, 1936-41; Legislative Councillor, 1948-55; founder member, Singapore Progressive Party; retired from politics since 1955.

M.J. Namazie, born in India; educated in Oxford; lawyer, company director; President, Singapore Indian Muslim League and All Malaya Muslim League.

of the MCA to consolidate the moderates in the Chinese community, but it was Macdonald who attempted to stem the tide of discontent within all communities.⁽²⁰⁾ First he tried to involve the various communities in a discussion of their problems by establishing the Communities Liaison Committee in January 1949. The CLC made its debut simply as the Sino-Malay Goodwill Committee which caused considerable anger amongst the Indians.⁽²¹⁾ Later the CLC was expanded, and E.E.C. Thuraisingham, a Ceylonese, was appointed chairman.⁽²²⁾ Somewhat predictably this did not quell Indian criticism, partly because Thuraisingham was notoriously Anglophile and partly because of his Ceylonese origins.⁽²³⁾ Later M.N. Cumarasamy was appointed to the Committee.⁽²⁴⁾ The objective of the CLC was to allow representatives of each community to discuss the problems peculiar to each of them. It also brought together prominent individuals from each ethnic group bound by close friendship, educational and professional ties.⁽²⁵⁾ The CLC was crucial in the attempts to find a solution to the citizenship controversy, the language issue and the question of elections.

(20) For more information on the role of Henry Gurney in the formation of the MCA, see M. Clark, 'The Malayan Alliance and its Accommodation of Communal Pressures, 1952-62', M.A. Thesis, University of Malaya, 1964, p. 21.

(21) Indian Daily Mail, 20 April 1949.

(22) Ibid.

(23) Ibid.

(24) Indian Daily Mail, 20 September 1949. However M.N. Cumarasamy's name never appeared in the official communiques of the CLC.

(25) The CLC included five Malays - Dato Onn, Dato Panglima Bukit Gantang (Perak menteri-besar), Salleh Hakim (Selangor State Councillor), Dr. Mustapha Osman (Kedah) and Zainal Abidin (Secretary-General, UMNO); four Chinese - Dr. Lee Tiang Keng, C.C. Tan, Yong Shook Lin and Tan Cheng Lock, all were state councillors; one Ceylonese - E.E.C. Thuraisingham, and one Indian - M.N. Cumarasamy, a fairly unknown figure in Indian political circles.

In its first major statement in September 1949, the CLC declared in favour of a thorough reconsideration of the citizenship provisions of the Federal Constitution, the election of members to the Federation's legislatures, elections for municipal councils, a franchise based on Federal citizenship and the compulsory teaching of English and Malay in Government and aided schools.⁽²⁶⁾ On this last point, it foreshadowed the Barnes Report of 1951. In April 1950 the CLC made fresh proposals for citizenship reforms.⁽²⁷⁾ It suggested that there be a ten year residential requirement as opposed to the existing fifteen years.⁽²⁸⁾ It recommended that as a result of this 'political concession on the part of the Malays', the Government should compensate by making extra efforts to 'ensure the full participation of Malays in the commercial life of the country'.⁽²⁹⁾ Thus the CLC ushered in the practice of communal bargaining over sensitive political issues, a tradition which survives in the Alliance of today.

The CLC was composed essentially of men of goodwill trying desperately to find solutions through compromise rather than coercion. The role of Macdonald here was crucial. He initiated the CLC, acted as 'liaison officer', and attended all the sessions. It is quite clear that through the CLC, the British were attempting to promote to national status, leaders of each community who were acceptable to the British. Macdonald was able to act as a very sensitive channel for the authorities of opinions and feelings within the CLC. The information he could command was essential because of the Communist insurgency. If changes to the

(26) Straits Times, 18 September 1949.

(27) Ibid., 19 April 1950.

(28) Ibid.

(29) Ibid.

Constitution were now necessary in order to diminish the appeal of the MCP, the British had to make a display of consulting the local communities. The CLC can also be regarded as a kind of 'test bore' to assess the depth of racial antagonism and undercurrents within each racial group. The CLC hence epitomized the British policy of fostering the aspirations of 'natural' nationalists over 'communist opportunism', ensuring of course that any concessions to 'genuine' nationalists would not threaten British interests.⁽³⁰⁾

The reactions of the Indians to the CLC's Report of September 1949 was one of enthusiasm despite initial misgivings.⁽³¹⁾ Budh Singh, President of MIC, though slightly annoyed over the exclusion of the MIC in the deliberations, welcomed the CLC as a forum where issues such as self-government, nationality, citizenship and education could be discussed.⁽³²⁾ However the Indian Daily Mail, the Tamil Murasu and Tamil organizations remained critical of the CLC and its members.⁽³³⁾ What was perhaps most significant about the CLC was that occasionally it projected the overwhelming suspicions of the Chinese by the Malays. Though on the surface Chinese and Malay members had reached agreement on the vital issues of citizenship and Malay privileges, in private Dr. Mustapha Osman from Kedah and Dato Zainal Abidin of the UMNO, were opposed to liberal citizenship laws and insisted on the preservation of Malay privileges.⁽³⁴⁾ Moreover Malay members, in particular Zainal Abidin,

(30) Straits Times, 4 March 1949.

(31) Malaya Tribune, 20 September 1949.

(32) Ibid.

(33) Tamil Murasu and Indian Daily Mail editorials for the entire month of September 1949 were critical of the CLC.

(34) Tan Cheng Lock to Yong Shook Lin, 19 January 1950 (Tan Cheng Lock Papers, N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

were firmly convinced that nationality was more significant than citizenship and were eager that non-Malays become state nationals before gaining Federal citizenship.⁽³⁵⁾ Moreover the moderate recommendations of the CLC were denounced by the 'Varsity Malays' who declared that it was a matter for consideration 'whether they should prefer continuing under the present system of Government to living under a Government comprising principally of Chinese towkays, Indian lawyers and Malay puppets'.⁽³⁶⁾

(iii)

The years 1950-1952 saw major political reforms, principally the introduction of the ministerial system, changes in citizenship laws and the introduction of elections. These changes were introduced essentially because the war against the communists was dragging on with little apparent success for the Government. Expenditure in connection with the Emergency had risen from \$24 million in 1948 to \$120 million in 1950.⁽³⁷⁾ Communist attacks on the railways, tin-mines and rubber-estates had assumed dangerous proportions.⁽³⁸⁾

J. Griffiths, Secretary of State for the Colonies, and J. Strachey, Secretary of State for War, were sent to Malaya in June 1950. They were followed in December 1951 by the then Secretary of State for the Colonies, Oliver Lyttleton.⁽³⁹⁾ The MIC submitted a memorandum to

(35) CLC meeting, 29 December 1949 (Tan Cheng Lock Papers).

(36) Indian Daily Mail, 20 May 1950.

(37) Straits Times, 6 May 1950.

(38) Malayan Monitor, volume 3, No. 12, December 1950.

(39) Tamil Nesan, 4 June 1950; Malay Mail, 10 December 1951.

Griffiths on 2 June 1950 urging the transfer of power to the local people and the introduction of elections within a 'reasonable' time.⁽⁴⁰⁾ The MIC also suggested that representation in the legislatures be in proportion to the population of the various communities.⁽⁴¹⁾ To Lyttleton, the Indians submitted two separate memoranda, one from the MIC, the other from the Federation of Indian Organizations.⁽⁴²⁾ The memoranda differed only with respect to their recommendations on citizenship.⁽⁴³⁾ The fact that two memoranda were presented undermined the representative claims of both the MIC and the FIO.

The visits by British Ministers in 1950 and 1951 coincided with a growing belief in British circles in Malaya that the authorities would have to nurture leadership within each community in order to woo the masses away from the Communists. In March 1950 the High Commissioner announced the introduction of the 'Member System' whereby Malaysians would be appointed as head of various Government departments in order to gain administrative experience.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Gurney saw this as 'a sure and steady progress towards freedom and democracy'.⁽⁴⁵⁾ The first appointments under this system were made in April 1951. The appointments involved three Malays, (Dato Onn, Tengku Yaacob Sultan Hamid who was a brother of the Kedah ruler, and Dato Mahmud bin Mat, chief minister of Pahang), one

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- (40) Memorandum submitted by the MIC delegation to Rt. Hon. Mr. J. Griffiths, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 2 June 1950, signed by K. Ramanathan, K.L. Devaser, Gurubaksh Singh Sambhi (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).
- (41) Ibid.
- (42) Memorandum from the MIC to O. Lyttleton, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 2 December 1951 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur); Malay Mail, 10 December 1951.
- (43) Malay Mail, 10 December 1951.
- (44) The Member System was proposed in April 1950, approved by the Legislative Council in January 1951 and put into effect in March 1951. See, Memorandum Relating to the Proposal for the Introduction of a System Under Which Departments of Government Will Be Grouped and Placed Under Members Who Will Be Responsible Therefore to the High Commissioner and Certain of Such Members Will Be Appointed From Among Unofficial Members of the Legislative Council, Council Paper No. 49 of 1950, Federation of Malaya.
- (45) Straits Times, 9 October 1950.

Ceylonese (E.E.C. Thuraisingham) and one Chinese (Dr. Lee Tiang Keng, CLC Member).⁽⁴⁶⁾

Because no Indian had been appointed to the Cabinet this announcement was met by an uproar from the Indian community.⁽⁴⁷⁾ In reply Gurney explained that an Indian councillor who had been approached in this matter had declined the post.⁽⁴⁸⁾ Gurney was referring here to R. Ramani who had refused the appointment 'for personal as well as political reasons'.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Ramani's fear was that the invitation to him as President of the FIO would exacerbate the antagonism between the FIO and other Indian organizations and aggravate existing divisions within the community.⁽⁵⁰⁾ He had been criticized at the time of the formation of the FIO as being ambitious to an unseemly degree, and had been stigmatized as 'the arch seeker of them all'.⁽⁵¹⁾ However this explanation did not quell the criticisms over the omission of an Indian from the Cabinet. The Indian Daily Mail which considered the Member System as 'an outmoded and diabolical form of dyarchic administrative reform', was nevertheless irate over this omission.⁽⁵²⁾ The Indian papers also criticised Ramani's refusal and in despair the councillor declared that he 'was happy in the thought that as apparently I can never hope to do right, there was no sense in attempting to do anything at all',⁽⁵³⁾

(46) The appointments were to the departments of Home Affairs, Agriculture and Forestry, Lands and Mines and Communications, Education, and Health.

(47) Indian Daily Mail, 14 March 1951.

(48) Ibid.

(49) Singapore Tiger Standard, 2 September 1951.

(50) Sunday Mail, 2 September 1951.

(51) Ibid.

(52) Indian Daily Mail, editorial, 15 March 1951, 10 April 1951.

(53) Sunday Mail, 2 September 1951.

The Member System was expanded in October 1953 with the inclusion of Dr. Ismail (UMNO) and H.S. Lee (MCA).⁽⁵⁴⁾ Still with no Indian in the Cabinet, all five Indians on the Federal Legislative Council resigned to save 'our own honour and the honour of our countrymen'.⁽⁵⁵⁾ They were disturbed as to why the Government never explained 'either why Indian participation in this expansion [of the Member System] was considered inappropriate at this stage or why the Government has now turned back on its protest^{at}ions of anxiety to secure Indian participation for the purpose of achieving a broad-based administration'.⁽⁵⁶⁾ They argued further that since Cabinet members had to be chosen from the Legislative Council, it was clear that they had been considered unsuitable for office and hence were an embarrassment to the Government.⁽⁵⁷⁾ If they left, the Government would be free to appoint whoever they felt had the more appropriate qualifications.

The letter of resignation continued in increasingly melodramatic language:

For this reason primarily and in the conviction that the attitude of the Government is bound to create the feeling here and elsewhere that the Indian community is no longer regarded by Government as of any political significance now or in the future, we have no alternative but to step back to the side of our countrymen and share with them the burden of their economic insignificance and political unimportance.⁽⁵⁸⁾

(54) Sunday Times, 11 October 1953. See also, Harry Miller, Prince and Premier, London, 1959, pp. 123-8.

(55) Sunday Times, 11 October 1953. The Indian Councillors included R. Ramani, V.M.N. Menon, S.O.K. Ubaidullah (Associated Indian Chamber of Commerce), P.P. Narayanan and M.P. Rajagopal (Malayan Trade Union Congress).

(56) Joint letter of resignation in Sunday Times, 11 October 1953.

(57) Ibid.

(58) Ibid.

Ramani also viewed the apparent neglect of the Indians as a constitutional error: 'By no act of diplomacy or geometry can you construct a triangle by elongating two sides. It also makes it more and more difficult for the third side to reach up to complete the triangle'.⁽⁵⁹⁾

The MIC supported these resignations though all five councillors belonged to the FIO.⁽⁶⁰⁾ The MIC sponsored a public meeting to protest against the Government's attitude and submitted a memorandum to the High Commissioner.⁽⁶¹⁾ However the Malayan Indian Association felt that the resignations were too hasty.⁽⁶²⁾ Tengku Abdul Rahman watched with interest. After many years of being attacked by Indian politicians for being communal, the Indians themselves were now behaving in an outrageously communal fashion. He concluded that the resignations 'prove that all talk about non-communal parties is an absolute sham'.⁽⁶³⁾

Two of the councillors who resigned were P.P. Narayanan and M.P. Rajagopal, both trade union representatives. The Labour Party and the Malayan Trade Union Congress were appalled that they should resign over a purely communal issue.⁽⁶⁴⁾ Indeed Lee Moke Sang, the Selangor representative on the Malayan Trade Union Congress resigned when the Congress refused to censure both men.⁽⁶⁵⁾ Lee pointed out that their

(59) Ibid.

(60) Malay Mail, 19 October 1953.

(61) Straits Times, 19 October 1953. See also, Letter from President, MIC to the High Commissioner, requesting an Indian Member in the Cabinet, 29 October 1953. This letter is reproduced in the Annual Report of the MIC, 1953-1954, Appendix C (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(62) Malay Mail, 11 October 1953.

(63) Singapore Tiger Standard, 12 October 1953.

(64) Ibid.

(65) Ibid.

action had far reaching consequences because P.P. Narayanan and M.P. Rajagopal had been members of a number of important Government committees, notably the Unemployment Code Division, the Federal Elections Committee and the Committee to Consider Ways and Means of Replacing Expatriate Officers with Asians.⁽⁶⁶⁾ Lee feared that the resignation of the Trade Union representatives over this issue would 'give rise to distrust by workers of other communities as to whether they can truly serve their interests irrespective of race, creed or colour'.⁽⁶⁷⁾

In reply the Indian trade unionists argued that they occupied communal seats since 'of the six seats allocated for labour, two were for Indians, two were for Chinese and two were for Malays'.⁽⁶⁸⁾ P.P. Narayanan continued defensively, 'we are being sacrificed at the altar of this muddle of communal representation. The whole issue is Constitutional. As long as I sit in the Federal Council as an Indian, that community can ask me to get out'.⁽⁶⁹⁾ Ramani supported this interpretation. 'The position is that of the labour group councillors who are Indians, neither of them would have gone into the Legislative Council if they had not been Indians. Primarily they must be Indians before they are labour representatives. Therefore the Indian representation was five'.⁽⁷⁰⁾

(66) Ibid.

(67) Ibid.

(68) Ibid.

(69) Singapore Tiger Standard, 14 October 1953.

(70) Malay Mail, 14 October 1953.

One favourable consequence of this raging controversy was that it produced a considerable measure of unity in an otherwise divided Indian society. In December 1953, the Government invited the MIC to submit names for appointment to the Federal Council, an unprecedented move since previously appointments had been made without prior consultations with the Indian community.⁽⁷¹⁾ The MIC submitted the names of K. Ramanathan, K.L. Devaser and V. Manickavasagam, from whom the Government selected Ramanathan.⁽⁷²⁾ The issue of an Indian Cabinet member was finally defused in late 1953 when V.M.N. Menon was appointed as Member for Posts and Telegraphs.⁽⁷³⁾

(iv)

Perhaps the major political change in the period after 1950 was the introduction of elections, first for local and municipal councils and subsequently for the Federal Council. The first elections to be held were for the Georgetown municipality in December 1951.⁽⁷⁴⁾ As the councils still had one-third of their non-official members nominated and also contained a substantial number of official members, the Government maintained an automatic majority. Moreover elections were limited to parties acceptable to the Government and the MCP remained outlawed. The significance of the election was still further reduced

(71) Tamil Nesan, 18 December 1953.

(72) Annual Report of the MIC, 1953-54, approved at the Eighth Annual Session of the MIC at Prai, April 1954, p. 6.

(73) Ibid.

(74) G. Hawkins, Report on Introduction of elections in the Municipality of Georgetown, Penang, 1951, Kuala Lumpur, 1953, pp. 20-21.

by the fact that the councils exercised limited powers.

In Penang the elections were for nine seats. Issues were purely local and the results depended more on personalities than upon parties or programmes.⁽⁷⁵⁾ A rather surprising feature of the elections was the high proportion of Indian candidates who stood either on UMNO, Labour Party or Radical Party tickets.⁽⁷⁶⁾ The MIC had decided to boycott the elections, arguing that they should be fought on non-communal lines.⁽⁷⁷⁾ However the Party allowed their members to participate under the sponsorship of other parties. The UMNO selected Indian Muslims to augment its appeal in a cosmopolitan Penang, while the Labour Party and Radical Party successfully fielded prominent Indians such as N. Ponnudurai who had achieved fame in 1948 campaigning for the secession of Penang from the Federation, Dr. N.K. Menon and Meera Husain.⁽⁷⁸⁾ It is clear from the Penang elections that the Indians stood for office as non-communal candidates, not from any ideological conviction but simply because their social and personal status made them attractive candidates. Furthermore since the majority of the non-communal parties were composed in the main of Chinese, the promotion of Indian candidates protected them from the charge of Chinese communalism.

(75) Indian Daily Mail, 8 December 1951.

(76) Ibid. Among the Indians who contested the Penang elections were A.M. Abu Bakar (merchant), Dr. S.M. Baboo (medical practitioner), both on UMNO tickets, Dr. N.K. Menon (medical practitioner), E.M. Meera Husain (lawyer) as Radical Party candidates, and A. Balakrishnan (Insurance Manager), N. Ponnudurai (Clerk), A. Raja Gopal (Insurance Agent), Jaswant Singh (Petition Writer) and P. David (teacher) as Labour Party candidates.

(77) Indian Daily Mail, 18 August 1951.

(78) G. Hawkins, Report on Introduction of elections in the municipality of Georgetown, Penang, 1951, p. 21.

The Kuala Lumpur municipal elections of February 1952 had major political consequences. First, they saw the emergence of inter-communal co-operation at the polls in the form of an UMNO-MCA alliance.⁽⁷⁹⁾ Second, they tested the significance of Indian communal voting and the appeal of Indian candidates in both Indian dominated and non-Indian dominated constituencies. Third, rather paradoxically, the elections marked the transformation of Dato Onn from an avowed multi-racialist into a Malay fanatic. This in a sense marked the 'beginning of the end of his IMP'.⁽⁸⁰⁾

As early as November 1950 the All Malayan Indian Congress Committee had decided that the MIC should contest municipal and town council elections.⁽⁸¹⁾ However it recognised that inter-community cooperation was necessary for electoral success. The MIC Working Committee confirmed the above decision in January 1951.⁽⁸²⁾ A few months later, K. Ramanathan, President of the MIC urged the UMNO and the MCA to join the MIC in an electoral pact.⁽⁸³⁾ He suggested the formation of an electoral board which would choose the candidates and their seats.⁽⁸⁴⁾ He declared that,

any party which refuses to put up candidates, foregoes a valuable right, neglects a responsibility and miserably misses a great opportunity for co-operation and service I am constrained to feel that it would be the highest blunder and silly self-effacement if any party were to decide to sit with folded hands when elections come off.⁽⁸⁵⁾

(79) Malay Mail, 9 January 1952.

(80) See, Vasil, op.cit., pp. 80-81.

(81) Minutes of All Malayan Indian Congress Committee Meeting, 19 November 1950 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur); Tamil Nesan, 20 November 1950.

(82) Straits Times, 26 January 1951.

(83) Tamil Nesan, 8 June 1951.

(84) Address by K. Ramanathan at the Fifth Annual Session of the MIC, 9 June 1951 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur); Straits Times, 10 June 1951.

(85) Address by K. Ramanathan, Fifth Annual Session of the MIC, 9 June 1951 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

This view was prompted by an awareness that in 1951 Indians formed a large percentage of the registered voters.⁽⁸⁶⁾ The folly of the Constitutional boycott of 1948-50, was a sharp lesson to the Indians. Indeed it was Ramanathan himself who had brought the boycott to an end.⁽⁸⁷⁾ However the Tamil Murasu and the Indian Daily Mail remained critical of MIC participation in the elections, arguing that the MIC was an ethnic organization and that by participating in elections it would inject communalism into politics.⁽⁸⁸⁾

But whilst the MIC prepared itself for an electoral alliance with the UMNO-MCA, a more attractive proposition appeared on the scene with the formation of the IMP in September 1951. K.L. Devaser who had replaced Ramanathan as MIC President, committed the MIC to Onn's IMP. In February 1952 Devaser himself contested the Kuala Lumpur municipal elections on an IMP ticket.⁽⁸⁹⁾ The Indian Daily Mail was highly critical. It condemned the action as an attempt 'to fly a national flag on a communal mast'.⁽⁹⁰⁾ However the IMP's hopes were crushed by the formation of an electoral alliance between the UMNO and the MCA in Selangor on 9 January 1952.⁽⁹¹⁾ The IMP and the MIC had predicted that cosmopolitan Kuala Lumpur would respond to the multi-racial slogans of the IMP, augmented by the charisma of Dato Onn. Though the MCA leaders had supported the IMP, this had not dampened their enthusiasm for the Alliance at the polls.

(86) Ibid.

(87) See chapter IV, pp. 136-137.

(88) Tamil Murasu, 26 November 1951; Indian Daily Mail, 5 December 1951.

(89) Indian Daily Mail, 29 February 1952.

(90) Ibid.

(91) Vasil, op.cit., pp. 56-59.

The UMNO-MCA coalition was a brilliant tactical move to exploit the communal sentiments of the electorate. Sentul, a Malay area was left to the UMNO, while the Chinese-dominated Imbi and Petaling wards were left to the MCA.⁽⁹²⁾ The Alliance won nine out of the twelve seats.⁽⁹³⁾ The IMP secured two seats and the remaining seat went to an Independent Indian.⁽⁹⁴⁾ The IMP's two successful candidates were both Indians from the Bungsar ward, an Indian stronghold.⁽⁹⁵⁾ The Independent Indian candidate was also from this area.⁽⁹⁶⁾ Hence the only defeats the Alliance suffered were in Indian areas. The implications were clear. Communalism was to be an entrenched feature of Malayan politics. The success of the UMNO-MCA pact spelt ruin for the IMP. The UMNO-MCA had fielded twelve candidates, five UMNO, six MCA, with one Indian woman

(92) In the 1952 Kuala Lumpur municipal elections, the racial composition of voters was as follows:

<u>Constituency</u>	<u>Malay</u>	<u>Chinese</u>	<u>Indian</u>
Sentul	2,730	720	approx. 500
Bungsar	780	390	2,842
Imbi	510	1,450	no figures available
Petaling	310	1,300	"

Source: Indian Daily Mail, 23 February 1952.

(93) Ibid.

(94) Ibid. Vasil, op.cit., p. 58.

(95) Bungsar Ward Elections, 1952

<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Votes polled</u>	<u>Result</u>	<u>Ethnic group</u>
S.C.E. Singham	Independent	719	won	Ceylon Tamil.
K.L. Devaser	IMP	577	won	Punjabi Hindu.
Mrs. Devaki Krishnan	IMP	570	won	Ceylon Tamil.
Ahmad Mohd	UMNO-MCA	517	lost	Malay.
Raja Mohd Raja Allang	UMNO-MCA	508	lost	Malay.
Mrs. Karala Singham	Labour	466	lost	Ceylon Tamil.
T. Rajendra	IMP	422	lost	Ceylon Tamil.
Mrs. E. Somasundaram	UMNO-MCA	232	lost	South Indian Tamil.

Source: Straits Times, 18 February 1952.

(96) Ibid.

who was an associate member of the MCA and whose husband in the MIC was a staunch advocate of the MIC's participation in the Alliance.⁽⁹⁷⁾ Dato Onn, marching on the ticket of non-communalism had looked around to see that only Indians were in his army.

The Tamil Murasu saw the critical weakness of the IMP.⁽⁹⁸⁾ It was of little value to include prominent persons in the Party who merely rendered lip service to it and who had no mass support.⁽⁹⁹⁾ This limited support for the IMP from Malays and Chinese reduced it to an Indian organization. This was reminiscent of the position of the AMCJA in 1948 when desertion by Chinese and Malay organizations left the Indians isolated. The MIC failed to see the writing on the wall. It stubbornly maintained a non-communal stance, and criticized the UMNO-MCA coalition as 'perpetuating communalism in a collective way'.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ The sole MIC supporter of the Alliance, V.J. Somasundaram had resigned from the IMP in December 1951, dismissing it as a party 'for the personal glorification of a few nominated legislative, state and municipal members'.⁽¹⁰¹⁾

The MIC also refrained from contesting the second municipal elections in Kuala Lumpur held in December 1952. Instead it called upon the Indian voters to support either the IMP or the Labour Party and to boycott the UMNO-MCA.⁽¹⁰²⁾ Somasundaram opposed this policy, fearing that it would arouse racial dissension.⁽¹⁰³⁾ In retaliation Devaser suspended

(97) Ibid.

(98) Tamil Murasu, 20 February 1952.

(99) Ibid.

(100) Tamil Murasu, 27 February 1952; Tamil Nesan, 28 February 1952.

(101) Straits Times, 20 December 1951.

(102) Tamil Nesan, 15 November 1952.

(103) Ibid., 19 November 1952.

him from the MIC for three months.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ The electoral success of the Alliance in Selangor encouraged the UMNO and MCA to extend their co-operation to elections in Johore Bharu, where they won all the nine seats and then to Muar where they were successful in three out of the four seats.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ In Malacca they suffered only one loss out of the three seats contested.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ In August 1953 in Seremban the Alliance swept home with a total of ten out of twelve seats. The two losses were to Indian candidates, one a Labour Party member, the other a powerful Independent.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾

Until 1954 Indian organizations kept their distance from the UMNO-MCA coalition. The only exception was in Penang where Indian Muslim League candidates were pleased to contest on the Alliance ticket.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ However in 1954 certain MIC state branches and the Perak Progressive Party negotiated with the Alliance to contest elections under the latter's sponsorship. Therefore in late 1954, the Alliance candidate in Batu Pahat was S.C. Macintyre, in Bungsar, K. Gurupatham, in Penang, S.M. Mohammed Idrus and in Ipoh D.R. Seenivasagam.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ All were either Indians or Ceylon Tamils. All won their seats. When D.R. Seenivasagam abandoned the Alliance in early 1955 it cost him his seat in the July Federal Elections.⁽¹¹⁰⁾ He returned to office only with the aid of the extreme Chinese communal vote in a by-election in 1956.⁽¹¹¹⁾

(104) Straits Times, 13 January 1953.

(105) Indian Daily Mail, 22 December 1953.

(106) Ibid., 24 August 1953.

(107) Ibid.

(108) See chapter II, pp. 55-56.

(109) Straits Times, 17 August 1954; Tamil Nesan, 28 December 1954.

(110) K.J. Ratnam, Communalism and the political process in Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1965, p. 200.

(111) Ibid.

(v)

By May 1953 the MIC had begun to agitate for Federal Elections to be held in 1954.⁽¹¹²⁾ It is possible that the MIC had been influenced by a similar decision by the UMNO in April 1953.⁽¹¹³⁾ Meanwhile in July the Government had established a Federal Elections Committee on which Dato Onn's National Conference was heavily represented.⁽¹¹⁴⁾ The MIC submitted a memorandum to the Committee in October 1953, demanding elections the following year.⁽¹¹⁵⁾ It further argued that all portfolios, except Defence and Finance, be held by elected members.⁽¹¹⁶⁾ When the Federal Elections Committee Report appeared in February 1954 the MIC sent a further memorandum asking that reserved seats be created in plural constituencies and that these seats be contested only by Indian candidates.⁽¹¹⁷⁾ It demanded that ten percent of the seats in the Legislative Council, except those representing special interests, be reserved for Indians.⁽¹¹⁸⁾ In explaining this demand the memorandum cited the insurmountable electoral disadvantages facing the Indian community. 'The preponderance of the voters of other communities would never furnish a chance to the Indian community, though the higher and educated strata of society may be inclined to be non-communal'.⁽¹¹⁹⁾

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- (112) Resolutions of the Seventh Annual Session of the MIC at Ipoh, 10 May 1953 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).
- (113) Straits Times, 8 April 1953.
- (114) G.P. Means, Malaysian Politics, London, 1970, p. 67, footnote 46.
- (115) Annual Report of the MIC, 1953-54, p. 2 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).
- (116) Ibid.
- (117) Annual Report of the MIC, 1953-54, 'Memorandum of 26 March 1954', Appendix B (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur); Malay Mail, 28 March 1954.
- (118) Annual Report of the MIC, 1953-54, 'Memorandum of 26 March 1954', Appendix B (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).
- (119) Ibid., Tamil Nesan, 2 April 1954.

This memorandum stands as one of the major turning points in the political history of the Malayan Indian community in this period. Faced with political extinction, the apostles of non-communalism, had joined the scramble for reserved communal seats. In April 1954 the High Commissioner rejected their demands.⁽¹²⁰⁾ The MIC then turned to Oliver Lyttleton, the Colonial Secretary, but here too they were rebuffed.⁽¹²¹⁾ The MIC, becoming more desperate, now turned to the Malay Rulers.⁽¹²²⁾ They met the Sultan of Selangor in July 1954 who promised to raise the matter at the Rulers' Conference later that month. The following month the MIC received a joint refusal from the High Commissioner and the Rulers.⁽¹²³⁾ It was pointed out that the reserved seats issue had not been raised by the MIC in their first memorandum in October 1953. Moreover though the publication of the committee's report had been in February 1954, the MIC had not made representations on the issue until 27 March. Finally the authorities rather sanctimoniously declared that they were loathe to deviate from the principle that 'no racial or communal limitations or reservations should be introduced into the electoral contests and the candidates and voters alike should be free from any such limitations or reservations'.⁽¹²⁴⁾

The MIC demand had been supported by Ramani, who like the MIC had, so recently, been a fervent supporter of non-communalism.⁽¹²⁵⁾ But Padi Krishnan of the Malayan Indian Association attacked the demand as being 'insincere' and V.J. Somasundaram condemned the move as 'the

(120) Tamil Nesan, 27 April 1954.

(121) Singapore Tiger Standard, 4 May 1954.

(122) Straits Times, 10 July 1954.

(123) Ibid., 11 August 1954.

(124) Ibid., 12 August 1954.

(125) Tamil Nesan, 15 July 1954.

brainwave of one or two leaders who wish to warm seats in the Legislative Council'.⁽¹²⁶⁾ Another regular critic, Jagjit Singh, President of the Penang MIC, denounced the demand as 'unrealistic', and he was suspended from the Party for his scurrillous comments on the ambitions of the MIC leaders.⁽¹²⁷⁾ Meanwhile the MIC held a public meeting on 23 August 1954 to protest at the authorities' refusal.⁽¹²⁸⁾ But the MIC's attempt to resurrect the principle of communal representation was short-lived. It was an attempt, bred, in the main, by frustration at the failure of the evolving political system to protect the interests of minority communities.

Indian fears of political oblivion were proved to be unfounded when the MIC joined the Alliance in 1954. In the General Elections of July 1955, though Indians formed only 3.9 per cent of the electorate as against 11.2 per cent for the Chinese and 84.2 per cent for the Malays, and though Indians were not in a majority in any one constituency, two Indians were elected, Macintyre in Batu Pahat and Sambanthan in Kinta Utara.⁽¹²⁹⁾ Both won on MIC-Alliance tickets. The absence of an

(126) Straits Times, 6 May 1954, 25 August 1954.

(127) Straits Times, 13 September 1954.

(128) Malay Mail, 24 August 1954.

(129) Ratnam, op.cit., p. 187, table 8 and p. 191.

Kinta Utara (Perak)

V.T. Sambanthan (MIC-Alliance)	7,900 votes.
Cik Mohd Yusuf bin Sheik Abdul Rahman	(National Action Party) 1,832 votes.
K.R.R. Choudhary	(Labour Party) 357 votes.
Mohd. Ramly bin Abdullah	(Perak Malay League) 214 votes.
Total electorate	12,304
Turn out	85.9%

Batu Pahat (Johore)

Chelvasingham Macintyre	(Alliance) 18,968 votes
Dato Haji Syed Abdul Kader bin Mohd	(Party Negara) 2,717 votes
Total electorate	27,323
Turn out	80.4%

effective opposition to the Alliance was striking. Dato Onn and his Party Negara, confronted a Malay electorate weary of his continually changing political stance and a Chinese populace increasingly concerned over his anti-Chinese posture. The Perak Progressive Party made its electoral debut with the rather amateurish Seenivasagam brothers, who at this stage showed little sign of the ability to manipulate Chinese communalism that was to be such a feature of their political careers in Independent Malaya. The extremist Malay parties, the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party and the Perak Malay League, isolated from the Chinese, Indians and the British were eliminated with ease from the formal political scene.

It is therefore relatively easy to account for the victory of the Alliance-supported Indians in Batu Pahat and Kinta Utara. It was a triumph of party over communalism and personality, particularly when one remembers that Macintyre's opponent in Batu Pahat was the powerful ex-Chief Minister of Johore. In 1955 Independence was clearly imminent and it was essential for the authorities to find a party with an efficient multi-racial leadership to carry the country into self-government. The Alliance had mastered communal politics; they were committed to the principles of democracy and the Commonwealth, and crucially, their relations with the British were excellent. In the circumstances the Indians desperately needed the patronage of the Alliance. The immediate post-independence years were to witness the rise of charismatic, populist Indian politicians, triumphant at the polls through sheer force of personality. This genre of leadership could not be achieved in 1955 within an Indian society, handicapped by the political boycott of the late 1940's, confused and muddled by the constantly changing political alignments of the early 1950's and the growing communalism of the middle of that decade.

(vi)

In contrast to the mainland, Singapore's political life was dominated by Indians from 1948-54. The principal reason for this was that the 1948 Singapore Elections Ordinance conferred universal adult suffrage on all British subjects, residing in the Colony.⁽¹³⁰⁾ This was highly advantageous to the Indians, as is shown by the following table.⁽¹³¹⁾

Table 1Composition of Registered Voters in 1948

<u>Ethnic Groups</u>	<u>Voters on the roll</u>	<u>Percentage of voters</u>
Chinese	5,627	25
Indians	10,141	45
Malays	3,146	14
Others	3,481	16
<hr/>		
Total	22,395	100
<hr/>		

Source: Yeo Kim Wah, Political Development in Singapore, 1945-55, p. 255.

(130) Yeo Kim Wah, op.cit., p. 255.

(131) Ibid.

Indians dominated the list of candidates who stood for election in 1948, and they formed a majority of the successful candidates.⁽¹³²⁾ The Indian candidates were mainly professionals and many were born in India.⁽¹³³⁾ The elections therefore led to the rise of a political faction dominated by the rich and educated. Their party programmes were not impressive. The issues debated at the polls were Malayanization of the civil service, improved social services, the institution of an elected majority in the Legislative Council within three years and whether Governor Franklin Gimson should be replaced.⁽¹³⁴⁾

The Malayan Democratic Union was highly critical of these Indian candidates. It accused them of being stooges of the British.⁽¹³⁵⁾ The MIC boycotted the election because it argued that it was undemocratic and indeed the MIC expelled its members who defied this decision.⁽¹³⁶⁾ Moreover the Malayan Democratic Union asked the Indian Government to prevent these Indians from participating in the elections, this presumably at the suggestion of the MIC. The Malayan Democratic

(132) Ibid., p. 265, table 12

Results of 1948 elections by ethnic group

<u>ethnic group</u>	<u>seats won</u>	<u>percentage of seats won</u>	<u>percentage of voters polled</u>
Indians	3	50	45.3
Chinese	1	16.3	25.1
Malays	1	16.3	14.0
Others	1	16.3	15.6
Total	6	100	100

(133) Ibid., p. 266.

(134) Ibid., p. 264.

(135) Ibid., p. 263.

(136) Indian Daily Mail, 7 October 1949.

Union in its telegram to Nehru accused Indian candidates of 'opportunism and personal aggrandizement', and 'of cooperation with the British in its scheme to perpetuate Colonialism in Malaya'.⁽¹³⁷⁾

The elections did not reveal any overt communal voting pattern except in the Malay area of Geylang which elected Sardon bin Jubir.⁽¹³⁸⁾ The dominance of Indians in Singaporean politics and their success at the polls can be attributed to the following factors. First, the Indians, unlike the Chinese, saw in the ballot box an instrument with which they could assert power in a predominantly Chinese state. Second, the Indians constituted a highly literate political group. Third, the Indian elite was skilled in debating the general issues of democracy and administrative reform rather than in populist politics, with its preoccupation with the specific issues of citizenship, language and Independence. Such a political style thrived in Singapore in the late 1940s. It was discredited by the anti-colonialist movements of the mid-1950s.

In the 1951 Legislative Council elections the Indians again demonstrated their influence in the Colony's politics, when fifteen out of a total of twenty-two candidates were Indian.⁽¹³⁹⁾ The Indians won four out of the nine seats.⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ The Indian success was due in the main to the fact that voting remained non-communal. But after 1953 the political atmosphere in Singapore was transformed with the rise of populist, Chinese-dominated politics, accentuated by a restless student

(137) V. Thompson and R. Adloff, Minority Problems in South East Asia, Stanford, 1955, p. 104.

(138) Yeo Kim Wah, op.cit., p. 264.

(139) Ibid., p. 266, footnote 43.

(140) Ibid.

body and with the increasing tempo of anti-colonialism, marked by the emergence of the Peoples Action Party.⁽¹⁴¹⁾ In the 1955 elections, fifty-six of the candidates were Chinese, only thirteen were Indian.⁽¹⁴²⁾ Fifteen Chinese and four Indians were elected.⁽¹⁴³⁾ Though voting still remained basically non-communal, it was apparent that the political decline of the Indians was due in part to the preponderance of Chinese voters in the Colony.⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ In this respect it is important to note that the Rendel Constitution of 1954 had removed the electoral privileges that the Indians had enjoyed as British subjects from 1948.⁽¹⁴⁵⁾

In the post-1954 era the Indian politicians survived only through personal charisma and revolutionary zeal. The political careers of S. Rajaratnam, Devan Nair, Jamit Singh, S. Woodhull and J.J. Puthucheary were built upon non-racialism, youthful dynamism and volatility.⁽¹⁴⁶⁾

(141) Ibid., pp. 281-282.

(142) Ibid., p. 269, table 14.

(143) Straits Times, 4 April 1955; Yeo Kim Wah, op.cit., p.273, table 15.

(144) Yeo Kim Wah, op.cit., p. 273.

(145) Ibid., p. 281.

(146) S. Rajaratnam, born in Ceylon; educated in London University; journalist; founder member, Peoples Action Party; Minister in Singapore Cabinet since 1959.

Devan Nair, born in Malacca; educated in Malaya and Singapore; Assistant Secretary, Singapore Teachers Union in 1946. Detained, 1951-1953 for membership in the Anti-British League; member of People's Action Party; Member for Parliament, Bungsar, 1964-1969.

Jamit Singh, born in Ipoh; founder member, University Socialists Club; official, Pan-Malayan Socialist Front; joined Trade Union Movement in 1954; Secretary of Singapore Trade Union Working Committee, 1956; Legal Adviser to various Trade Unions.

S. Woodhull, born in Federation; educated in University of Malaya; trade unionist; founder member, Socialist Club and Peoples Action Party; Secretary Naval Base Labour Union; Assistant Secretary, Singapore Factory and Shop Workers Union; detained, 1963-64; retired from politics; banished to Malaya, where he is practising as a lawyer.

J.J. Puthucheary, born in Federation; educated in University of Malaya; trade unionist; founder member, Peoples Action Party and University of Malaya Socialist Club; assistant secretary, Singapore Factory and Shop Workers Union; detained 1951-52, 1956-59 and 1963-64; leader, Barisan Socialis; retired from politics; a lawyer in Malaysia; banned from Singapore.

Compiled from Yeo Kim Wah, op.cit., pp. 293-295 and J.V. Morais, The Leaders of Malaya and Who's Who, 1959-60, Kuala Lumpur, n.d.

In the case of Woodhull, Jamit Singh and Puthucheary, their revolutionary excesses eventually led them into areas sensitive to the indigenous ruling oligarchy. In the 1960s they were all banished to the mainland.⁽¹⁴⁷⁾

(vii)

As formal Malayan politics moved from the advisory councils of 1945 to the Federal elections of 1955, the British were anxious to create or engender a stable and loyal Malayan population. In this context the issues of citizenship and education were crucial. The issue of citizenship was introduced into the political arena by the Malayan Union Plan of 1946. The Federation of Malaya Agreement two years later imposed stringent citizenship qualifications on the Indians and Chinese so that by 1950 only approximately half a million Chinese and a quarter of a million Indians were citizens of the Federation.⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ These figures represented approximately 20 per cent and 30 per cent of the Chinese and Indian populations respectively.⁽¹⁴⁹⁾

To the Indians citizenship was a perplexing issue. Many Indians were undecided as to whether they should belong to India or to Malaya and cherished hopes of maintaining dual citizenship. In June 1946 the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce appealed to the Government of India to support proposals for dual citizenship but with little result.⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ In May 1948 Macdonald had private discussions with Nehru

(147) Yeo Kim Wah, *op.cit.*, pp. 293-295.

(148) Annual Report, Federation of Malaya, 1950, p. 24.

(149)	Total population in Malaya in 1950	-	5,226,549
	Malays	-	2,579,914
	Chinese	-	2,011,072
	Indians	-	564,454

Annual Report, Federation of Malaya, 1950, p. 24.

(150) Jananayagam, 11 June 1946.

on this issue,⁽¹⁵¹⁾ and in February 1949 Budh Singh, President of the MIC, during a visit to India petitioned for dual citizenship, on the grounds that Malayan citizenship did not include the concept of nationality.⁽¹⁵²⁾ In August of the same year Ramani submitted a memorandum to the Indian Constituent Assembly, requesting an Amendment whereby Malayan Indians could retain Indian citizenship along with that of Malaya.⁽¹⁵³⁾ He argued that, 'whenever you become a Federal citizen, it does not detract and it does not subtract from your nationality, whether as an Indian, Chinese, British or any other nationality'.⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ This statement exposed him to severe criticism from the Chinese, Malays and certain Indian groups in Malaya.⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ But citizenship legislation passed on 14 August 1949 in India finally ended all hopes of dual citizenship for the Malayan Indians.⁽¹⁵⁶⁾

Apart from this agitation for dual citizenship, the Indians unlike the Chinese, failed to see citizenship as a serious issue in the politics of survival in Malaya. The Indian community at large was generally apathetic, whilst Indian politicians, when they did speak on this issue, tended to be indiscreet and often reckless. For example, in December 1950 the Malaya Tribune reported a rush for Malayan citizenship by Indians, caused perhaps by legislative changes in Indian citizenship in 1949. Ramani cautioned the Indians against any such haste.⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ Then in January 1951, K. Ramanathan, President of MIC, described Federal citizenship as similar to 'wearing a silk shirt. There is no difficulty

(151) Tamil Nesan, 12 May 1948.

(152) Tamil Nesan, 22 February 1949.

(153) Malaya Tribune, 11 August 1949.

(154) Ibid.

(155) Ibid.

(156) Tamil Nesan, 18 August 1949.

(157) Malaya Tribune, 18 December 1950.

and there is nothing to lose. The silk shirt may be worn here; when we go back to India, the khaddar shirt may be worn. However one should see that the silk shirt is carefully preserved against decay'.⁽¹⁵⁸⁾ In this he was implying that citizenship bestowed privileges but no obligations.

When J. Griffiths, the Colonial Secretary, arrived in June 1950, the MCA petitioned him for jus soli in citizenship, whereas Indian representations made no mention of this issue.⁽¹⁵⁹⁾ Again when Oliver Lyttleton visited Malaya in December 1951, the Indians submitted two separate memoranda.⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ Only on the citizenship issue, did their demands differ. The MIC demanded a five years residence qualification for citizenship. The Federation of Indian Organizations requested that citizenship rights be accorded to Ceylonese and Indians on easier terms than to the Chinese because the former were British subjects.⁽¹⁶¹⁾ Therefore the Indians displayed neither great concern nor any consensus of opinion on the citizenship question.

In contrast the Chinese were keenly aware of this issue as was reflected in their reactions to the Communities Liaison Committee's report of 1950 which recommended the introduction of state nationality. This recommendation on citizenship was embodied in an Ordinance introduced in the Legislative Council in June 1951. Devaser was 'suspicious',⁽¹⁶²⁾ whilst the MCA was disappointed and called for a Royal Commission on citizenship.⁽¹⁶³⁾ Until August 1951, the MCA and the Associated Chinese

(158) Minutes of MIC working committee's emergency meeting, 11 February 1951 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur); Tamil Nesan, 27 January 1951.

(159) Indian Daily Mail, 4 June 1950.

(160) Malay Mail, 10 December 1951.

(161) Ibid.

(162) Malaya Tribune, 30 March 1951.

(163) Malaya Tribune, 10 June 1951.

Chamber of Commerce opposed the Ordinance while the Indians were vague in their reaction.⁽¹⁶⁴⁾ The Ordinance was later referred to a Select Committee, where the Indian and Ceylonese members were R. Ramani and Dr. A.E. Duraisamy respectively.⁽¹⁶⁵⁾ In 1952 the Select Committee made its recommendations which were embodied in the Federation of Malaya Agreement (Amendment) Ordinance, 1952. Under this ordinance citizenship could be claimed by those who had resided for at least ten years in the Federation, by those who had been born in the Straits Settlements or a British Colony, and by those who had one local-born parent.⁽¹⁶⁶⁾ But there was no question of jus soli which was most urgently sought by the non-Malays. It was estimated that between 50 - 60 per cent of the Chinese and 30 per cent of Indians were now eligible for citizenship.⁽¹⁶⁷⁾

The most important aspect of the ordinance was that it introduced state nationality. However this implied nine nationalities, not one and this clearly could not satisfy either the Indian or the Chinese. The Indians, in particular, complained that state nationality was a divisive concept and the MIC immediately established a committee to examine the issue.⁽¹⁶⁸⁾ This committee recommended single nationality and a five years' residential qualification for citizenship.⁽¹⁶⁹⁾ The immediate

(164) Tamil Nesan, 16 August 1951; Singapore Tiger Standard, 11 July 1951.

(165) Tamil Nesan, 10 February 1952.

(166) Federation of Malaya Agreement (Amendment) Ordinance, 1952, article 125; see Ratnam op.cit., pp. 86-91.

(167) By the end of 1953, 1,157,000 Chinese and 222,000 Indians were citizens while another 433,000 Chinese and 186,000 Indians were eligible for citizenship. Ratnam, op.cit., p. 92.

(168) MIC sub-committee on citizenship, 5 May 1951, Press release (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(169) Ibid.

Chinese response was to invite Victor Purcell to study the position of the Chinese in Malaya, with a view to pressing for a liberalization of the citizenship laws.⁽¹⁷⁰⁾ This greatly annoyed the UMNO and the Malays.⁽¹⁷¹⁾

In October 1955 Chinese militants from Perak led by Lau Pak Khuan, demanded five instead of ten years as the residential qualification for citizenship, and also insisted on the abolition of the language requirement.⁽¹⁷²⁾ These demands embarrassed the moderates in the MCA and led to a crisis in the Party in April 1956, though it was still possible for the MCA extremists to send a delegation to the Colonial Office to present their position on citizenship.⁽¹⁷³⁾ Meanwhile the Chinese guilds, school-teachers and some Party extremists, who were behind these agitations, made plans to hold mass meetings to coincide with the arrival of the Reid Commission in June 1956.⁽¹⁷⁴⁾ Indeed the MCA drew up a memorandum on jus soli and requested the MIC and other Indian organizations to submit their views on this question.⁽¹⁷⁵⁾

At first the MCA decision to submit a separate memorandum to the Reid Commission threatened to divide the Alliance.⁽¹⁷⁶⁾ However the MIC soon made it clear that though it would submit a memorandum on citizenship it 'would not bypass but go through the Alliance', and by August 1956 a compromise between the Alliance members had been reached.⁽¹⁷⁷⁾ The

(170) Tamil Nesan, 21 August 1952. See M. Roff, 'The M.C.A. 1948-1965', JSEAH vol. 6, No.2 September 1965, p. 46.

(171) Straits Times, 26 March 1953.

(172) Indian Daily Mail, 6 October 1955.

(173) Tamil Nesan, 14 April 1956, 18 April 1956. Straits Times, 17 April 1957. See also Means op.cit., pp. 200-201.

(174) Tamil Nesan, 12 April 1956, 14 April 1956.

(175) Ibid., 14 April 1956; Straits Times, 22 March 1956; 28 April 1956.

(176) Tamil Nesan, 22 June 1956; Means, op.cit., pp. 193-194.

(177) Tamil Murasu, 2 June 1956.

principle of jus soli was accepted, but it was to be implemented only after independence.⁽¹⁷⁸⁾ There was division only over the number of years of residence required for citizenship - the UMNO wanted a minimum of ten, the MCA seven, and the MIC five, though it was prepared to accept seven.⁽¹⁷⁹⁾

(viii)

In the plural society of Malaya it was inevitable that the related issues of language and education would be politically contentious. There was an unavoidable conflict of interest between, on the one hand communal newspapers, cultural societies, and communal leaders and on the other the British authorities attempting to foster a Malayan identity through a national system of education in which the two main media of instruction were to be English and Malay. As a result the perennial question was whether the various races should be encouraged to assimilate or integrate, whilst preserving their separate identity. The language and education issues were not as serious for the Indian community as they were for the Chinese simply because a relatively greater number of Indians spoke English.⁽¹⁸⁰⁾ Yet, as will soon be clear, it would be

(178) Indian Daily Mail, 19 September 1956.

(179) Ibid.

(180) Literacy Rates - West Malaysia, 1957

Language	English	Malay	Chinese	Tamil
Race				
Malay	5%	46%	-	-
Chinese	11%	3%	53%	-
Indian	16%	5%	-	57%
All races	10%	25%	-	-

Source: Federation of Malaya, Population Census Report, 1957, p. 21.

wrong to suggest, as both Margaret Clark and Victor Purcell have done, that these issues caused no stir in the Indian community in the 1950s.⁽¹⁸¹⁾

The first postwar Government statement on educational policy was made in 1946.⁽¹⁸²⁾ It was proposed that there would be six years of free primary education either in the mother tongue (in practice Malay, Chinese or Tamil) or in English.⁽¹⁸³⁾ However English was to be taught even in the vernacular schools.⁽¹⁸⁴⁾ At a secondary level, again instruction could be given in either Malay, Chinese, Tamil or English.⁽¹⁸⁵⁾ However in the racially-tense atmosphere of the postwar period this laissez-faire policy could not prevail for long. With the establishment of the Federation in 1948, a new educational policy was urgently required. Towards the end of 1949 a Central Advisory Committee on education was established and the Committee presented its findings in May 1950.⁽¹⁸⁶⁾ Somewhat surprisingly it proposed relatively few changes to the existing structure and as a result major objections were raised to the Report in the Legislative Council in July.⁽¹⁸⁷⁾ The Report was shelved.⁽¹⁸⁸⁾

But major changes were imminent. In 1950 L.J. Barnes, Director of Social Training at Oxford University, was appointed to investigate Malay education. His report, published in 1951, proposed the gradual transformation of all existing schools into National schools in which children

(181) M. Clark, 'The Malayan Alliance and its Accommodation of Communal Pressures, 1952-62', p. 147. V. Purcell, 'Notes and Comment - The Crisis in Malayan Education', Pacific Affairs, vol. XXVI, No.1, March 1953, p. 74.

(182) Malayan Union Advisory Council Paper No.53 of 1946 (M.U. Confidential 162/46).

(183) Ibid., p. 1-2.

(184) Ibid.

(185) Ibid.

(186) Tamil Nesan, 28 May 1950.

(187) Tamil Nesan, 22 July 1950.

(188) Ibid.

of all races would be taught only in English or Malay.⁽¹⁸⁹⁾ The Chinese rejected this attempt to foster a Malayan nationality through the education system, as pandering to Malay nationalism and as being resentful of the Chinese heritage.⁽¹⁹⁰⁾ In order to present their own views, the Chinese put pressure on the High Commissioner, Henry Gurney, to appoint another committee, this time to consider Chinese education. The resulting Fenn Wu Committee proposed a trilingual education system.⁽¹⁹¹⁾ It argued that while Malaya's educational policy should be directed towards creating a strong Malayan nation, a sense of belonging to Malaya could most effectively be fostered through the different cultures and diverse school systems of the three communities.⁽¹⁹²⁾

The Indians condemned both reports. Critics of the Barnes Report included the Tamil school-teachers, the Tamil Press and R. Ramani.⁽¹⁹³⁾ Indeed Ramani condemned both the Barnes and Fenn Wu Reports as 'avowedly the products of sectionalism and therefore cannot by themselves form the basis of a scheme of education for the whole of Malaya'.⁽¹⁹⁴⁾ Even the MIC which until then had taken a moderate line on the language and education questions, sponsored a meeting of Indian organizations in Malaya to consider these issues.⁽¹⁹⁵⁾

The MIC was particularly annoyed by the fact that the Government had not established a committee to investigate Tamil education. It

(189) Report of the Committee on Malay Education, Chairman, L.J. Barnes, Kuala Lumpur, 1951, chapter XII.

(190) Clark, op.cit., p. 133.

(191) Chinese Schools and the Education of Chinese Malaysians. The Report of a Mission invited by the Federation Government to study the Problem of the Education of the Chinese in Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, June 1951, chapter VII.

(192) Ibid.

(193) Straits Times, 10 July 1951; 13 August 1951; Tamil Nesan, 6 July 1951; Tamil Murasu, 10 July 1951.

(194) Straits Times, 13 August 1951.

(195) Indian Daily Mail, 6 July 1951; 15 July 1951.

therefore decided to form its own committee to consider the Barnes Report's recommendations and the position of Indian schools.⁽¹⁹⁶⁾ In this it was supported by Indian political and cultural organizations, and by labour unions particularly those in Lower Perak.⁽¹⁹⁷⁾ The Indian Education Committee, established in June 1951, recommended that the first three years of education should be in the mother tongue.⁽¹⁹⁸⁾ In the fourth year, English and Malay would be introduced.⁽¹⁹⁹⁾ The ultimate objective was that eventually the medium of instruction would be English though the mother tongue would still be taught as a subject. In addition the Committee also accepted Malay as the national language of the state.⁽²⁰⁰⁾

These recommendations were moderate, seeking the use of Tamil as the medium of instruction only in the primary schools and accepting English in the secondary schools. In fact the committee's educational proposals were merely a statement of the status quo, for existing Tamil schools were all primary schools.⁽²⁰¹⁾ Even these schools faced problems of insufficient funds, unsuitable textbooks and equipment and a lack of qualified teachers.⁽²⁰²⁾ Their only active supporters were the Dravida Kalagam, the Tamil Press and the Tamil school-teachers.⁽²⁰³⁾

(196) Ibid., 15 July 1951.

(197) Ibid.

(198) Memorandum on Indian Education in the Federation of Malaya by the Indian Education Committee under the auspices of the MIC, Kuala Lumpur, 31 August 1951, p.3 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(199) Ibid., p.4.

(200) Ibid.

(201) Saravanan Gopinathan, Towards A National System of Education in Singapore, 1945-73, Singapore, 1974, p. 14.

(202) Ibid., p.15.

(203) Ibid., p.14.

In short the Government was faced with a diaspora of conflicting and confusing reports. In September 1951 it decided to attempt to reconcile all groups by establishing a Central Advisory Committee on Education which would include members of all races.⁽²⁰⁴⁾ The Indian member was originally R. Ramani but he was replaced by V.M.N. Menon in August 1952.⁽²⁰⁵⁾ The recommendations of this committee followed Barnes rather than Fenn Wu though the committee accepted that the mother tongue would be taught in the Malay or English 'National' schools.⁽²⁰⁶⁾ It emphasized that the Government had no intention of withdrawing assistance from vernacular schools until there were sufficient national schools to replace them.⁽²⁰⁷⁾ The report also assured vernacular school-teachers that they need not fear unemployment. The Federal Legislative Council considered the three reports, Barnes, Fenn Wu and that of the Central Advisory Committee on 19-20 September 1951 and then referred them to a special committee under the Attorney General.⁽²⁰⁸⁾ The resulting legislation was introduced by E.E.C. Thuraisingham, the Member for Education, as the Education Ordinance of 1952. The Ordinance adopted from Barnes the concept of the 'national school' but provided facilities for instruction in Chinese and Tamil where fifteen or more pupils requested it.⁽²⁰⁹⁾

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- (204) Tamil Murasu, 22 September 1951. 'Report of Central Advisory Committee on Education', 10 September 1951, Chairman L.D. Whitfield (Tan Cheng Lock Papers, item 143, N.A. Kuala Lumpur).
- (205) Tamil Nesan, 2 August 1952.
- (206) 'Report of Central Advisory Committee on Education', L.D. Whitfield, p.2, Clark, op.cit., p.136.
- (207) 'Report of Central Advisory Committee on Education', L.D. Whitfield, p.2.
- (208) Federation of Malaya, Annual Report on Education for 1957, p. 19.
- (209) Federation of Malaya, Education Ordinance, 1952, No.63 of 1952, p.2.

This was not popular with the Indians and was vehemently opposed by the Chinese.⁽²¹⁰⁾ The Indians feared that with the introduction of the 'national schools', the Government would immediately withdraw the grants given to vernacular schools. This would be particularly serious for the Indian community for the Tamil schools survived principally on financial assistance from the Government. On the other hand, a privately financed Indian education system was impossible, partly through an absence of Indian philanthropy (in contrast to the Chinese community) and partly because the management of Tamil schools was often interfered with by rival political factions such as the Tamils Representative Council and the Dravida Kalagam.⁽²¹¹⁾

Fully aware of these implications for Tamil education in Malaya, the MIC embarked on a campaign against the 1952 Ordinance.⁽²¹²⁾ Here it attracted the hostility of the Malays most notably that of Tunku Abdul Rahman. The UMNO leader doubted the sincerity of the MIC on this issue and saw the campaign as an attempt to force a breach between the UMNO and the MCA. His suspicions were aroused by the fact that the MIC had invited the MCA to join with it in the campaign against the 1952 Ordinance.⁽²¹³⁾ In a letter to Tan Cheng Lock on 23 September 1953, Tunku Abdul Rahman attempted to reassure the Chinese by stating that the implementation of the Ordinance would be postponed because of the need for financial stringency.⁽²¹⁴⁾ He asked Tan Cheng Lock to ensure that

(210) Clark, op.cit., p. 137; Tamil Murasu, 10 December 1952.

(211) Federation of Malaya, Annual Report on Education for 1951, p. 15; Annual Report, Department of Education, Colony of Singapore, 1948, pp. 32-38.

(212) Tamil Nesan, 2 August 1953.

(213) Letter from MIC Secretary to Wen Tien Kuang, Secretary-General, Chinese Education Committee, 14 July 1953 (Tan Cheng Lock Papers, N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(214) Letter from Tunku Abdul Rahman to Tan Cheng Lock, 23 September 1953 (Tan Cheng Lock Papers, N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

Chinese protest was channelled through its literary circles and that the MCA should never 'seek the help of the Indians'.⁽²¹⁵⁾ In reply the MCA confirmed that the MIC had indeed invited it to cooperate in its campaign.⁽²¹⁶⁾ Following the intervention of Tunku, the MCA quickly abandoned any thought of working with the MIC.⁽²¹⁷⁾

It should be noted however that the Indian community was not united in its response to the 1952 Education Ordinance. Some sections of the community, most notably, the Singapore Regional Indian Congress, saw possible long term benefits in the Ordinance.⁽²¹⁸⁾ As the Ordinance proposed the teaching of Chinese and Tamil in 'national schools' where there was sufficient demand, the possibility arose that Tamil children could receive better Tamil instruction in essentially English-language schools than in financially-handicapped Tamil schools.⁽²¹⁹⁾ This view was severely criticized by Tamil organizations in the Federation and the Colony and eventually led to a serious split between the Tamil militants and the non-Tamils in the Singapore Regional Indian Congress.⁽²²⁰⁾ The result was a strong reassertion of Tamil dominance in the MIC.⁽²²¹⁾

(215) Ibid.

(216) Letter from Wen Tien Kuang, Secretary-General, Chinese Education Committee, to Tunku Abdul Rahman, 28 September 1953 (Tan Cheng Lock Papers, N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(217) Letter from Wen Tien Kuang, Secretary-General Chinese Education Committee to MIC Secretary, 1 October 1953 (Tan Cheng Lock Papers, N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(218) Indian Daily Mail, 10 October 1953.

(219) The 1951 Annual Report on Education in Singapore mentioned that 'it appears that the Indian parent himself will not send his children to a vernacular school if he can find places for them in an English school'; this was understandable in the light of the vastly inferior Tamil schools facing insurmountable difficulties in staff and text-books. Saravanan Gopinathan, op.cit., p. 16.

(220) Indian Daily Mail, 10 October 1953.

(221) See chapter II, pp. 61-63.

Effective co-operation between the Indian and Chinese communities over language and education issues was made impossible not so much by differences of opinion within the Indian community, but by the fundamentally different approaches adopted by the two communities as a whole. The MIC accepted Malay as a national language. They sought simply to preserve Tamil education at the primary level. In contrast the Chinese demanded that their language be afforded equal status with Malay and English. The Indians sought to guarantee the opportunity for their children to receive their basic education in Tamil. The Chinese demanded a multi-lingual Legislative Council and a Chinese University.

However, the fact that the MIC and MCA pursued radically different objectives did not prevent occasional cooperation between the two Parties in opposition to the 1952 Ordinance. For example in mid-1953 they agreed to mount a campaign against the Ordinance, on the grounds that it was a denial of the principles of education in the mother tongue, and that it was opposed to the equal development of the language and culture of each of the three races.⁽²²²⁾ Again Tunku Abdul Rahman intervened. In a letter to Tan Cheng Lock on 10 October 1953, he expressed fears that the MIC-MCA campaign could drive a wedge between the MCA and the UMNO.⁽²²³⁾ He explained that 'I am under fire in my own community. You must win over the China-born Chinese', that section of the Chinese community who stood to lose most by a withering away of Chinese education.⁽²²⁴⁾

The Government rejected the protests of the MIC and the MCA. In reply to a letter from Tan Cheng Lock stating that the non-Malays feared that the Education Ordinance was a 'death-verdict on vernacular schools',

(222) MCA Chinese Education Committee Minutes, Kuala Lumpur, 13 August 1953, p.11.

(223) Letter from Tunku Abdul Rahman to Tan Cheng Lock, 10 October 1953 (Tan Cheng Lock Papers, N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(224) Ibid.

Gerald Templer argued that such fears were simply unfounded.⁽²²⁵⁾ The Government accepted the role of vernacular schools; furthermore it was not inevitable that the Chinese language would disappear if the Chinese schools were closed.⁽²²⁶⁾ He continued, 'there has been no suggestion that the Chinese language and culture should not be preserved and given its rightful place in Malaysian society. What it would seem is being sought at the moment is that Chinese language, culture and education should be allowed to continue its exclusive and separatist position in a Malayan society. Such a proposal is utterly unacceptable'.⁽²²⁷⁾

Faced with this attitude on the part of the Government, the Chinese community became enraged over the language issue. The main instigators of the protest were Chinese chauvinists, including most prominently the Associated Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Chinese School-Teachers Association. In August 1954 the latter organization even went so far as to petition the United Nations, claiming that the 1952 Ordinance, by depriving Chinese and Tamil children of vernacular education, was racially discriminatory.⁽²²⁸⁾ But the Chinese language protest soon spread beyond the area of education and the Chinese began to demand a multi-lingual Legislative Council which implied the acceptance of Chinese as a national language.⁽²²⁹⁾

(225) Letter from Gerald Templer to Tan Cheng Lock, 6 July 1953. Letter from Tan Cheng Lock to Gerald Templer, 12 May 1953 (Tan Cheng Lock Papers, N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(226) Letter from Gerald Templer to Tan Cheng Lock, 6 July 1953 (Tan Cheng Lock Papers, N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(227) Ibid.

(228) Memorandum to the United Nations from the United Chinese School Teachers, Federation of Malaya, 14 August 1954 (Tan Cheng Lock Papers, N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(229) Letter from T.H. Tan to Tan Cheng Lock, 25 August 1954 (Tan Cheng Lock Papers, N.A. Kuala Lumpur); Straits Times, 20 December 1954.

The Malays reacted strongly. The Party Negara, particularly in Kedah and Johore, accused the MCA of demanding that Chinese be made an official language; it also accused them of regarding the Malays as being without a culture.⁽²³⁰⁾ Dr. Ismail of the UMNO, anxious to maintain the Alliance, toured Kedah and Johore in an attempt to allay Malay fears.⁽²³¹⁾ At the same time he wrote to Tan Cheng Lock, that 'our first objective must be to gain independence, and once that has been achieved, through victory at the national elections, side issues like vernacular education can be settled'.⁽²³²⁾ However the MCA was unable to contain the more extreme elements in the community who, into 1955, continued to demand a Chinese language University and a multi-lingual Legislative Council.⁽²³³⁾

The Indians viewed this controversy with bewilderment. The MIC leadership, a partner in the Alliance from late 1954, opposed the concept of a multi-lingual Legislative Council, arguing that only Malay and English should be regarded as official languages.⁽²³⁴⁾ However the Penang and Province Wellesley MIC branches did, for a time, support the Chinese demand but their support was short-lived.⁽²³⁵⁾ Faced with national elections in 1955, the Alliance attempted to defuse the issue. In its election manifesto, it pledged itself to re-examine the 1952

(230) Singapore Tiger Standard, 23 August 1954.

(231) Letter from Dr. Ismail to Tan Cheng Lock, 24 August 1954 (Tan Cheng Lock Papers, N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(232) Ibid.

(233) Straits Times, 19 February 1955.

(234) Straits Times, 23 February 1955.

(235) Straits Times, 10 March 1957, 7 September 1957.

Ordinance and 'to establish a type of national school that will be acceptable to the people of Malaya and will promote their culture, economic, social and political development as a nation so far as to facilitate the fulfillment of the Alliance's aim to adopt Malay as the national language of the country'.⁽²³⁶⁾

Following their success in the Federal Elections in July 1955, the Alliance established a committee under Dato Abdul Razak to study the education issue. The Razak Report recommended for primary education, the establishment of 'national schools' in which the medium of instruction would be either English or Malay.⁽²³⁷⁾ Chinese and Tamil primary schools would continue to exist, but both Malay and English would be compulsory subjects in those schools.⁽²³⁸⁾ At the secondary level, Razak proposed the existence only of 'national schools' open to all races in which either English or Malay would be the medium of instruction.⁽²³⁹⁾ Though the Razak Report specifically recognized the need to continue Government financial assistance to the Chinese and Tamil primary schools, the suspicion remained that the ultimate objective of the Government was to phase out Chinese and Tamil primary education. Non-Malay fears were further aroused by the Report's recommendation that proficiency in Malay be regarded as a pre-requisite for entry into secondary schools, for the award of scholarships and for entry to the Civil Service.⁽²⁴⁰⁾

(236) Alliance Manifesto for the Federal Elections, June 1955, cited in Clark, op.cit., p. 138.

(237) Federation of Malaya, Report of the Special Committee on Education, 1956, Kuala Lumpur, 1958, para. 54-58.

(238) Ibid.

(239) Ibid.

(240) Ibid., para. 22-23.

These criticisms were expressed by a committee established in August 1956 by the Selangor MIC to examine the Razak Report.⁽²⁴¹⁾ In response the committee proposed that the first three years of education should be in the mother tongue, and that vernacular teaching should be available throughout primary and secondary education.⁽²⁴²⁾ However the MIC committee did not oppose the Razak Report's proposal that Malay should be made the national language.⁽²⁴³⁾ Inevitably this moderate MIC response was opposed by militant Tamil chauvinists, principally the Malaya Tamil Pannai, whose chairman announced that 'we are following the lead of Chinese educationists who are fighting to protect their culture'.⁽²⁴⁴⁾

The Razak Report formed the basis of the National Education Bill unanimously passed by the Federal Legislative Council in early 1957.⁽²⁴⁵⁾ The Chinese extremists remained profoundly angry over the education policy and indeed by exploiting this disenchantment were able to ensure the success of the Perak Progressive Party against the Alliance in the by-election in Ipoh in November 1957.⁽²⁴⁶⁾ The MIC leadership remained silent, but the Selangor MIC, and in particular the Kuala Lumpur branch, agitated strongly against the new legislation.⁽²⁴⁷⁾ Furthermore at the twelfth annual session of the MIC in July 1958, the Penang MIC submitted a resolution proposing that Tamil and Chinese be made official

(241) Report of The Education Committee appointed by the MIC, Selangor State, 25 August 1956 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(242) Ibid., p. 5.

(243) Ibid.

(244) Straits Times, 18 August 1956.

(245) The Alliance had a majority of 51 out of the 52 elected seats in the Legislative Council to facilitate this unanimous decision.

(246) Straits Times, 10 December 1957; Clark, op.cit., p. 144.

(247) Tamil Nesan, 6 December 1957.

languages.⁽²⁴⁸⁾ Resolutions were also passed demanding the establishment of secondary Tamil schools.⁽²⁴⁹⁾ The Federation Malay School Teachers Association reacted sharply to these Indian complaints. 'If the Indians were truly loyal to the country they should not hesitate to learn the Malay language and stop suggesting unwanted ideas which would only retard the progress of Malaya to an independent nation'.⁽²⁵⁰⁾ In an attempt to pacify the UMNO, the MIC leadership under Sambanthan, refrained from taking up the complaints from the branches.⁽²⁵¹⁾ This was of considerable comfort to the UMNO which was already facing a rebellious MCA over this issue. But the MIC paid dearly for its compromising stance, for it explains, at least in part, the defeats of MIC candidates in the militant Bungsar ward in municipal elections in 1957 and 1958.⁽²⁵²⁾

In conclusion, it is clear that the Indian community's concern over the issues of language and education in the 1950s was not as strong as that of the Chinese.⁽²⁵³⁾ Nevertheless, the Indian community in this period constantly recognised the importance of maintaining the opportunity

(248) Twelfth Annual Session of the MIC, July 1958, p.2 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(249) Ibid.

(250) Malay Mail, 1 April 1959; D.E. Moore, 'The United Malays National Organization and the 1959 Malayan Elections: A Study of a Political Party in Action in a Newly Independent, Plural Society', Ph.D. Thesis, University of California, 1960, p. 248.

(251) Tamil Murasu, 1 December 1958.

(252) Straits Times, 11 July 1959; Moore, op.cit., p. 250.

(253) While the Chinese campaigned for a multi-lingual Legislature and a Chinese University, the Indians campaigned simply for a Department of Indian Studies in the English-language University of Malaya. The Department was finally established in 1956 - see S. Arasaratnam, 'Indian Studies in the University of Malaya' Tamil Oli, Tamil Language Society, University of Malaya, 1966-67, p. 135. For further details on the campaign for a Chinese University, see Letter from Lee Kong Chian to Tan Cheng Lock, 9 February 1953; Memorandum on Chinese University in Malaya n.d; 1953 Radio debate between Tan Cheng Lock and Sydney Caine on the proposed Chinese University, 30 January 1953 (Tan Cheng Lock Papers, I.S.E.A.S. Singapore).

for its children to receive their education in Tamil and occasionally they reacted with considerable vigour in defence of their language. Hence Margaret Clark's view that 'throughout the course of this linguistic controversy, no parallel Indian voice was raised to demand special status for the Tamil tongue or special concessions for the Indian schools',⁽²⁵⁴⁾ cannot be sustained.

(ix)

If liberal citizenship provisions and a national system of education were seen as the basis of a newly-created Malayan identity then its formal political aspect would be in the development of non-communal parties. Within such parties Indian involvement tended to be dominant. For example, those Indian intellectuals who found that the MIC did not meet their aspirations for a democratic and egalitarian society tended to join the Malayan Democratic Union in the period up to 1948, and the Malayan Labour Party in the 1950s. Both parties were multi-racial left-wing organizations. The Malayan Democratic Union was initially a liberal organization which campaigned for citizenship with nationality whilst at the same time accepting the Malay language as the national language.⁽²⁵⁵⁾ However by 1948 Communist influence within the Party had become Communist domination, and when the MCP revolt occurred in June 1948, followed by repressive legislation, the Malayan

(254) Clark, *op.cit.*, p. 147.

(255) For a detailed account of the Malayan Democratic Union, see Cheah Boon Keng, 'The Malayan Democratic Union, 1945-1948', M.A. Thesis, University of Malaya, 1974.

Democratic Union dissolved itself. Indian influence in the Party was concentrated on its extreme left-wing faction. Most notable here was P. Sarma, the President of the Singapore Teachers Union, who succeeded in bringing into the Malayan Democratic Union the majority of teachers in Singapore and the Federation.⁽²⁵⁶⁾ He was closely involved with the Singapore Teachers Union's representation to the Carr-Saunders Commission on Higher Education in 1947 and was also active in the Singapore Cooperative Society. In 1951 he was detained on account of his connections with the MCP-led Anti-British League and was repatriated to India two years later.⁽²⁵⁷⁾ He then made his way to Peking where he now lives as head of the Malayan National Liberation League.⁽²⁵⁸⁾

Another prominent left-wing Indian in the Malayan Democratic Union was 'Jacko' Thumboo. He was a graduate of the Agricultural College at Serdang, Selangor, and was initiated into left-wing politics by Quok Peng Cheng, a member of the wealthy Kok family of Johore Bharu. Both fled to the jungle in June 1948, but were soon killed by the Malayan security forces. Indian intellectuals such as Sharma and Thumboo became closely associated with the MCP essentially because their moderately left-wing convictions brought them into contact with hard-line Communists who then entwined them into extremist politics.⁽²⁵⁹⁾

(256) For further details on P. Sarma see Straits Times, 16 March 1951, 28 November 1952, 2 December 1954, 26 May 1956; Indian Daily Mail, 21 December 1952.

(257) Cheah Boon Keng, op.cit., pp. 119-120.

(258) Ibid., p. 120.

(259) Indian intellectuals' involvement in the Malayan Democratic Union's extremist faction was facilitated also by their earlier involvement in either extremist Trade Union activities or in the Indian National Army. For example, the Democrat, a semi-official publication of the MCP and Malayan Democratic Union was edited and published by S.A. Das formerly of the Indian National Army. He was pro-MCP and was co-author with K.B. Subbiah of Chalo Delhi, an Historical account of the Indian Independence Movement in East Asia, Kuala Lumpur, n.d. Later Quok Peng Cheng became the editor of the Democrat.

Indian involvement in left-wing parties, particularly the Malayan Labour Party was responsible for the emergence of an Indian elite which was truly non-communal and commanded the allegiance of all working class communities. The Malayan Labour Party had its origins in Penang when the Penang Labour Party was formed in May 1951;⁽²⁶⁰⁾ a Selangor branch was established in December of the same year.⁽²⁶¹⁾ Both branches were formed by English educated Government servants and trade unionists and were composed predominantly of Chinese and Indians.⁽²⁶²⁾ They were anti-colonial and anti-communist. The Indians who were prominent here were D.S. Ramanathan and V. Veerappen, both teachers from Penang and V. David, a railway employee from Selangor.⁽²⁶³⁾

The electoral successes of the Malayan Labour Party were concentrated in Penang, essentially because there it attracted protest votes over the Government's education and citizenship policies particularly from more extremist elements. During the period 1951-1955, the Malayan Labour Party had widespread support from the Indian workers, particularly the English-educated white collar workers.⁽²⁶⁴⁾ However after 1955, its support came increasingly from the Chinese New Villages and urban Chinese workers, and as a result the Party came under increasing extremist Chinese influence.⁽²⁶⁵⁾

(260) Straits Echo, 16 May 1951.

(261) Straits Times, 24 December 1951.

(262) Vasil, op.cit., p. 98-99, p. 110.

(263) D.S. Ramanathan, born in India; school-teacher; Chairman, Malayan Labour Party; Mayor of Penang; Member, Penang Municipal Council.

V. David, born in Kuala Lumpur; railway employee; Secretary-General of National Union of Factory and General Workers; Founder Member of Selangor Labour Party; Member, Municipal Council Kuala Lumpur, Selangor State Assembly and later Member for Parliament.

V. Veerappen, born in Malaya; teacher; Executive Committee Member of Malayan Labour Party; later Member for Parliament.

(264) Vasil, op.cit., p. 110.

(265) Ibid., p. 115.

Being members of a minority community, Indians were attracted to non-communal parties, not only the Malayan Democratic Union and the Malayan Labour Party, but also the moderate Independence of Malaya Party. The IMP was formed in September 1951 by Dato Onn following his failure to transform the UMNO into a multi-racial organization.⁽²⁶⁶⁾ The emergence of the IMP coincided with an important phase in the politics of the Indian community, for with the announcement of elections, Indians were forced to seek electoral partners. On its side the IMP welcomed Indian support, in the light of its failure to attract the Malays and the growing estrangement of the Chinese. As was noted earlier, the IMP's success in the Kuala Lumpur municipal elections of February 1952, was confined to Indian candidates in Indian areas.⁽²⁶⁷⁾

Within the Indian community, only Padi Krishnan of the Malayan Indian Association had serious doubts about Onn.⁽²⁶⁸⁾ The MIC, the Federation of Indian Organizations, the Indian Chamber of Commerce, and the Ceylon Federation of Malaya each supported the IMP, the latter because its President, Thuraisingham was a senior official in Onn's Party.⁽²⁶⁹⁾ The IMP was an organization comprised of elite Malaysians who favoured inter-racial cooperation. Their commitment to the latter was clearly seen in their support of the Barnes Report of 1951 which advocated both English and Malay as the national medium of instruction.⁽²⁷⁰⁾ But by August 1952 the IMP was weakening, following the exodus of prominent Chinese, which left the party with only Indian support.⁽²⁷¹⁾ Indians

(266) Straits Times, 30 September 1951. For more details on the IMP see Vasil, op.cit., pp. 47-81.

(267) See pp. 156-157.

(268) Tamil Nesan, 14 June 1951.

(269) Ibid., 17 September 1951.

(270) Ibid. See also, Vasil, op.cit., pp. 71-72.

(271) Straits Times, 16 September 1952. Tamil Nesan, 5 August 1952.

faithfully followed Onn into the National Conference in April 1953 and only withdrew after disagreement over the issue of Federal elections in 1954.⁽²⁷²⁾

Even when the Party Negara was formed in February 1954, as a successor to the IMP, many Indians continued to offer their loyalties to Onn.⁽²⁷³⁾ This was very surprising for the Party Negara stood for militant Malay demands - the rejection of Chinese and Tamil languages, the establishment of Islam as the state religion and severe restrictions on Chinese and Indian immigration.⁽²⁷⁴⁾ Indeed it is virtually impossible to discover any logical explanation for the continual support of Onn by Indian stalwarts such as R. Ramani, V.M.N. Menon, S.O.K. Ubaidullah, S. Shanmugam and E.E.C. Thuraisingham.

In Singapore the Progressive Party and the Singapore Labour Party were both dominated by Indians in the period 1948-53.⁽²⁷⁵⁾ In this period the

(272) See chapter VII, pp. 238-240.

(273) Tamil Nesan, 1 August 1954.

(274) Vasil, op.cit., p. 85; Straits Times, 6 July 1955.

(275) The Singapore Progressive Party Leadership, 1945-55

<u>Ethnic group</u>	<u>Birthplace</u>	<u>Language</u>	<u>Occupation</u>
Chinese	9 Singapore	9 Monolingual	Business 7
Indians	5 Federation	4 (English) 18	Profession 11
Malays	1 Other	Bilingual 2	Office
Others	5 countries	7	workers 2
			Others 0
Total:	20	20	20

The Singapore Labour Party Leadership, 1948-53

	<u>Birthplace</u>			<u>Education</u>	
	<u>Indians</u>	<u>Non-Indians</u>		<u>Indians</u>	<u>Non-Indians</u>
Singapore	1	4	Secondary		
			School Leavers	10	4
Federation	2	0	University/		
Other countries	7	4	College	0	4
Total:	10	8	Total:	10	8

	<u>Occupation</u>			<u>Trade Union</u>	
	<u>Indians</u>	<u>Non-Indians</u>		<u>Indians</u>	<u>Non-Indians</u>
Business	3	1	Army and		
Profession	1	5	Services Union	6	1
Office Workers	6	2	Other Unions	5	3
Others	0	0			
Total:	10	8	Total:	11	4

Source: Yeo Kim Wah, Political Development in Singapore 1945-55, p. 102, table 3; p. 108, table 5.

political scene was dominated by moderate, English-educated, essentially pro-British elites, free of communal chauvinism and militancy. However the Rendel Constitution of 1954 secured a Chinese majority in the electorate and this coupled with growing student militancy and the emergence of Chinese communalism and anti-colonialism led to the political eclipse of the Indians.⁽²⁷⁶⁾ After 1955, the Peoples Action Party attracted almost all the Indian vote in the Colony as well as charismatic Indian leaders such as Jamit Singh, C.V. Devan Nair, S. Woodhull, S. Rajaratnam and J.J. Puthucheary.⁽²⁷⁷⁾

In conclusion, the Indian political role in Singapore was far more decisive in the period 1948-53 than in the years after 1953. With the rise of communal and mass politics, in the 1950s, Indian political leadership was at a discount. To survive, the Indian community was forced to join the Alliance on the mainland and the Peoples Action Party in Singapore. The Indians succumbed to communal politics, at least in Malaya. Even where Indian political leaders held on to the principles of non-communalism and socialism, ironically those parties thrived only on the basis of rising Chinese communalism. For example, the Malayan Labour Party led ostensibly by D.S. Ramanathan and V. David, was in effect manipulated by Chinese communalists and Communists who provided the mass of the electoral support.⁽²⁷⁸⁾ It is difficult to escape the

(276) Yeo Kim Wah, op.cit., pp. 253-259.

(277) Pang Cheng Lian, Singapore's People's Action Party: its History, Organization and Leadership, Singapore, 1971, p. 52.

(278) English educated liberals in the Malayan Labour Party since 1954 were D.S. Ramanathan, V. Veerappen, N. Patkunam, S. Sathappan and they were gradually losing influence to Chinese-educated militants, Tan Kai Hee, Wee Lee Fong, Ng Ann Teck. Among this latter group of Chinese dominated militants, two Indians gained access, Dr. Rajakumar and V. David purely through their intimate contacts with Chinese workers in Kuala Lumpur and in the surrounding Chinese New Villages in Selangor. See Labour Party of Malaya, Annual Report, 1961-62, cited in Vasil, op.cit., p. 140.

conclusion that the Indian 'leadership' was little more than a facade, protecting the party from the charge of being Chinese, Communalist and Communist. This device was also evident in the Perak Progressive Party where the Seenivasagam brothers provided respectability to what was really a Chinese communal party. (279)

(279) The Perak Progressive Party was divided into two distinct groups, on the one hand, the Seenivasagam brothers and a small number of moderate Ceylonese, Indians and Chinese who were completely loyal to them, and on the other, an extremist Chinese group led by Khong Kok Yat and Chan Swee Ho. According to R.K. Vasil, the Seenivasagam brothers had considerable support though there were doubts as to whether they commanded a sustained loyalty. See Vasil, op.cit., p. 247.

S.P. Seenivasagam, born in Ipoh; lawyer; Member, Perak State Legislative Assembly and Malayan Parliament; founder member of Perak Progressive Party, later to be the People's Progressive Party.

D.R. Seenivasagam, born in Ipoh; lawyer; Member, Ipoh and Menglembu Municipal Council 1954-1957; elected to Federal Legislative Council in 1956; Member for Parliament 1959- ; founder member of Perak Progressive Party and later People's Progressive Party.

Factionalism In The Indian Community In Malaya, 1945-57

(i)

The Indian community in postwar Malaya was, as it is now, heavily fragmented.⁽¹⁾ The lines of cleavage were many. There were divisions into formal political parties - the Malayan Indian Congress, Malayan Indian Association and the Federation of Indian Organizations; there were ethnic divisions between the Ceylonese, the South Indians and North Indians, and there was a division between local-born and foreign-born. Indian politics were further fractured by innumerable clashes of personality between leading political figures. Inevitably therefore, on each of the major issues facing the Indians, a united response was difficult to achieve.

Political consciousness amongst the Indians, activated by the Indian National Army during the Japanese Occupation, remained high in the immediate postwar period. In order to consolidate this increased consciousness, Indian leaders sought to revive dormant political organizations. One such organization was the Central Indian Association of Malaya (CIAM) which from its formation in 1936 until the outbreak of the Pacific War, had been an effective spokesman for the Indian community.⁽²⁾ During Nehru's visit to

(1) S. Arasaratnam, 'Social and Political Ferment - the MIC, 1945-55', Proceedings of the First International Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies, Kuala Lumpur, January 1968, Vol. 1, pp. 141-156.

(2) For more details on the activities of the CIAM, 1936-41, see S. Arasaratnam, Indians in Malaysia and Singapore, London, 1970, pp. 96-102; M.R. Stenson, Industrial Conflict in Malaya, London, 1970, pp. 28-30, 122-123; R. Ampalavanar, 'Social and Political Developments in the Indian community of Malaya, 1920-41', M.A. Thesis, University of Malaya, 1969, pp. 86-94.

Malaya in March 1946, the revival of the CIAM was discussed, and there can be little doubt that the Indian National Congress in Delhi was eager to see the organization revived.⁽³⁾ The inauguration of the Malayan Union in April 1946 provided the immediate impetus for the revival of the CIAM.⁽⁴⁾ That same month the Association invited all Indian organizations in Malaya to submit to it their views on the Malayan Union citizenship proposal. The response was very poor and the CIAM quickly faded from the scene.

In Singapore, A.N. Mitra and R. Jumabhoy attempted to resurrect the Singapore Indian Association in order to consolidate Indian political opinion.⁽⁵⁾ But this attempt proved abortive as the powerful Tamil elites preferred to form a new party.⁽⁶⁾ Most Indian elites were alarmed by the growing Communist influence on the Indian working classes.⁽⁷⁾ For example, the trade unions were Communist dominated.⁽⁸⁾ Moreover, there were overt Communist organizations such as the New Indian Democratic Youth League, formed in October 1945, and the Indian Communist Party formed in Singapore later the same year. In September 1945 a large and enthusiastic gathering of Indians met at Ipoh to discuss the Malayan Communist Party's 'Eight Proposals' for Malaya's future

(3) Indian National Congress Executive Committee meeting, New Delhi, 17 April 1946, cited in Tamil Nesan, 26 April 1946.

(4) Tamil Nesan, 27 April 1946. See Chapter IV, p. 106.

(5) Tamil Nesan, 22 May 1946, 14 June 1946, 14 July 1946.

(6) Ibid., 14 July 1946.

(7) See Chapter III, pp. 68-73.

(8) See Stenson, op.cit., pp. 60-63, 103-104, 108-110.

government.⁽⁹⁾ This rising tide of Communism had to be checked.

In August 1946, John Thivy, who had been active in the Indian National Army, arranged an open conference for all Indians to discuss the formation of a new association.⁽¹⁰⁾ The conference was open in order to prevent the proceedings from being dominated by ambitious individuals or factions, as well as to ensure a semblance of communal unity. Thivy was aware that this newly-formed MIC would attract the opposition of existing Indian organizations, fearing that they would be eclipsed.⁽¹¹⁾ Therefore he emphasized that these organisations, principally the Indian Chambers of Commerce, trade unions, ethnic and linguistic associations would retain their individual, functional importance.⁽¹²⁾ But a clash of interests was inevitable. For example, when the MIC established a Labour department in 1946, this was opposed by the trade unions who feared that the MIC would inject communalism into industrial relations.⁽¹³⁾ Moreover, the MCP strongly resisted the MIC, fearing that Indian labour in the Communist-dominated PMFTU would now defect to the MIC.⁽¹⁴⁾ However, at its first annual session in June 1947, the Congress converted its Labour section into an Economics department, partly because it had not attracted trade union leaders and partly because the Congress had been intimidated

- (9) V. Thompson and R. Adloff, Minority Problems in South-East Asia, Stanford, 1955, pp. 100-101.
- (10) Draft Proposals for an All Malaya Indian Organization to be inaugurated at the All Malaya Conference, Kuala Lumpur, 3-5 August 1946 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).
- (11) Presidential Address at First Annual Session of the MIC, Kuala Lumpur, 7-10 June 1947 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).
- (12) Ibid; Sunday Tribune, 29 September 1946.
- (13) Tamil Nesan, 25 August 1946.
- (14) Stenson, op.cit., pp. 123-124.

by the strong censure from the United Planters Association of Malaya and British officials over the Party's inquiry into the Kedah Strikes earlier that year.⁽¹⁵⁾

In addition in its first year of existence, the MIC had to accommodate the demands of separatist groups in Singapore. These were met by the establishment of a separate Singapore branch.⁽¹⁶⁾ A.N. Mitra who had been active in the revival of the pre-war Singapore Indian Association was hurriedly appointed Chairman of the Singapore Regional Indian Congress.⁽¹⁷⁾ Soon after its formation, the MIC established local branches throughout Malaya.⁽¹⁸⁾ Delegates from each of these branches attended a national Annual Session, each branch being entitled to send one delegate for every two hundred branch members.⁽¹⁹⁾ In addition, representatives from the local branches formed State Regional Congress Committees; one quarter of these Regional Committee members were selected for the All Malayan Indian Congress Committee.⁽²⁰⁾ Therefore, at its lower levels, the MIC structure was essentially democratic. However at its highest levels it was unmistakably autocratic. The MIC President though

(15) Presidential Address at First Annual Session of MIC, Kuala Lumpur, 7 June 1947 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(16) Draft Proposals for an All Malaya Indian Organization, to be inaugurated at the All Malaya Conference, Kuala Lumpur, 3-5 August 1946, p. 5 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(17) Indian Daily Mail, 1 August 1948.

(18) Within nine months of its inauguration, the MIC had fifty-two branches and a total membership of 20,000 - see Annual Report, MIC, 1946-47, p. 2 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur); Indian Daily Mail, 10 June 1947.

(19) Draft Proposals for an All Malaya Indian Organization, Kuala Lumpur, August 1946, p. 5. For more details on aspects of the MIC Constitution, structure of the Party and formation of branch organizations, see S. Subramaniam, 'Politics of the Indians in Malaysia, 1945-55', M.A. Thesis, University of Malaya, 1974, pp. 73-82.

(20) Draft Proposals for an All Malaya Indian Organization, Kuala Lumpur, August 1946, p. 6.

elected by the Annual Session, worked through a Working Committee composed of sixteen members of the All Malayan Indian Congress Committee.⁽²¹⁾ This Working Committee was nominated by the President himself. As a result in both policy-making, and day to day administration, the MIC was dominated by the character of the President.⁽²²⁾ Furthermore, though the execution of the resolutions adopted at the Annual Session was in theory the responsibility of the All Malayan Indian Congress Committee, in practice only the Working Committee had the power to execute these resolutions.⁽²³⁾

The autocratic leadership of the MIC inevitably led to conflicts with the regional and local branches. These conflicts were exacerbated by splits within these local groups themselves, and by divisions between the Regional Congresses. For example, the Singapore Regional Congress, with a membership of five thousand, was a dominant influence in the MIC in its early years, partly because it had considerable influence over the Tamil Press and also because the Serangoon and Seletar branches in the colony controlled the Singapore trade unions.⁽²⁴⁾ However in the

(21) Ibid.

(22) The only check on the President's powers was the Annual Session which examined the Party's policies and financial statements. However even then, the President could in practice postpone the Annual Session indefinitely. This was a popular tactic with both K.L. Devaser, President from 1951-55, and V.T. Sambanthan, President from 1955-73, in order to avoid open conflicts within the Party.

(23) Indian Daily Mail, 13 July 1950.

(24) Membership of the Singapore Regional Indian Congress, August 1946 - December 1947.

Branches	1946	Increase in June 1947	Increase in December 1947	Total
Serangoon	1,225	320	266	1,811
Joo Chiat and Changi	340	257	76	673
Tanjong Pagar	220	555	10	785
Seletar	419	1,015	76	1,210
Town	425	180	-	605

Source: Indian Daily Mail, 5 May 1948.

late 1940s the Singapore Congress declined in influence essentially because of conflicts with the MIC leadership and opposition from the powerful Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce.⁽²⁵⁾

The Selangor Regional Congress, though strongly represented in the MIC leadership, also contained highly volatile branches most notably in the Bungsar-Brickfields district. This area was an impregnable Indian stronghold and therefore attracted the electoral interest not only of the MIC but also the IMP and the Malayan Labour Party.⁽²⁶⁾ In contrast, the rural areas of Selangor provided a very conservative MIC membership who often came into conflict with the radicals from Bungsar-Brickfields.⁽²⁷⁾ In addition, the Malacca Regional Congress, being dominated by Chettiars and Tamil conservatives, was also opposed to the radical policies of the MIC in the late 1940s.⁽²⁸⁾ The Perak Regional Congress was also heavily fragmented having to reconcile the more radical branch in Ipoh with the moderate factions from Sungei Siput, Krian and the Chettiar-dominated Kuala Kangsar.⁽²⁹⁾ The Johore Regional Congress had a close rapport with caste and ethnic associations in that state and concentrated on social reform.⁽³⁰⁾

(25) Indian Daily Mail, 9 March 1949.

(26) See Chapter V, pp. 155-156.

(27) Interview with S. Govindaraj, General Secretary of the MIC, 1949-52, and Executive Member, Selangor Regional Congress, 1953-59, Kuala Lumpur, 16 January 1975. See also D.E. Moore, 'The United Malays National Organization and the 1959 Elections: A Study of a Political Party in Action in a Newly-Independent, Plural Society', Ph.D. Thesis, University of California, 1960, pp. 242-245.

(28) Tamil Nesan, 2 March 1948, 31 January 1950; Indian Daily Mail, 9 March 1949.

(29) Straits Times, 18 February 1955.

(30) Indian Daily Mail, 25 April 1948.

Finally the Penang and Province Wellesley Regional Congress was a vitriolic opponent of the MIC leadership.⁽³¹⁾ From 1954 it was augmented by a strong Tamil faction, which embarrassed the MIC leadership by demanding that Tamil be made an official language in Malaya, though the MIC had accepted Alliance policy, making Malay the only official language.⁽³²⁾ In addition, in 1956 the Penang branch mounted a campaign for jus soli in citizenship and for severe limitations on Malay privileges.⁽³³⁾ To the despair of Sambanthan, the MIC President, the Penang-Province Wellesley MIC rebelled against the leadership and supported opposition parties in the rural and town board elections in December 1957.⁽³⁴⁾ In short, the MIC was fragmented by a lack of co-ordination between the leadership and the regional and local branches, by ethnic divisions within the Regional Congresses, by the uncompromising position of the MIC leadership over the Constitutional issue between 1948-50, and by the vulnerability of local branches to poaching by non-communal parties such as the IMP and the Malayan Labour Party.

(31) Straits Times, 23 February 1955, 10 March 1957, 7 September 1957.

(32) Tamil Nesan, 15 September 1956, 26 September 1956.

(33) Ibid., 26 September 1956.

(34) Straits Times, 20 December 1957, 24 December 1957.

(ii)

By 1949 the MIC was afflicted not only by serious divisions at its branch level but also by the stigma of an early political partnership with left-wing organizations such as the AMCJA.⁽³⁵⁾ The boycott of the Federation Agreement from 1948 by the MIC had produced still further divisions within the party.⁽³⁶⁾ But above all, the MIC had to struggle against accusations from the Malays that it was dominated by foreign-born Indians.⁽³⁷⁾ In the circumstances it was inevitable that the MIC leadership began to have doubts whether the party could be regarded as a legitimate spokesman of the domiciled loyal Indians. This became a crucial issue following the attempt by the UMNO in May 1949 to open membership to non-Malays.⁽³⁸⁾ A further important development in this respect was the formation in February 1949 of the MCA, 'to foster and safeguard the social, political, cultural and economic welfare of the Malayan Chinese by legitimate and constitutional means'.⁽³⁹⁾

In the face of these major political changes, the MIC leadership felt that a radical reform of the Party was urgently required. The subsequent changes aimed at 'emphasizing the national character', of the MIC.⁽⁴⁰⁾ Membership was to be restricted to loyal Malayan Indians,

(35) See Chapter IV, pp. 117, 120-123.

(36) See Chapter IV, pp. 128-132.

(37) Majlis, 23 November 1946, 3 December 1946; Utusan Melayu, 20 November 1946; UMNO circular, 29 November 1950, in UMNO/SG, File 113/50, circular No. 6/50 (UMNO Papers, N.A. Kuala Lumpur).

(38) Straits Times, 30 May 1949. This was of course simply associate membership.

(39) Vasil, op.cit., p. 24; Means, op.cit., p. 120; Straits Times, 28 February 1949.

(40) Indian Daily Mail, 21 June 1949.

including Pakistanis and Ceylonese, and the MIC was to campaign for citizenship for all those 'who regard Malaya as their real home and object of their loyalty'.⁽⁴¹⁾ This decision to include in the MIC only Indians loyal to Malaya arose from Budh's conviction that 'alien' Indians 'had blurred and confused the policy of the Congress and thus considerably weakened the organization'.⁽⁴²⁾ This view was echoed by N.T.R. Singham, President of the Selangor Regional Congress who condemned the meddling of 'alien' Indians in Malayan politics, as 'aggression against the Malayan people'.⁽⁴³⁾ 'We cannot', he stated, 'fly foreign flags, shout foreign slogans, sing foreign national anthems, give our loyalties to a foreign country and at the same time want to meddle in the affairs of Malaya. To continue to do so is to arouse the hostility of the Malayan People'.⁽⁴⁴⁾

This sudden change in attitude in favour of excluding non-domiciled Indians from the Party was somewhat startling since at its formation the MIC had declared itself as representing all Indians in Malaya.⁽⁴⁵⁾ What made the change of policy all the more disconcerting was that Budh Singh, the man who pressed for this reform, had during

(41) Ibid., 22 June 1949.

(42) Ibid., 21 June 1949.

(43) Tamil Nesan, 4 July 1949.

(44) Ibid.

(45) Tamil Nesan, 8 August 1946. Resolution adopted at the inaugural meeting of the MIC in 1946 to 'include all Indians whether citizens or not' was reiterated at the first annual session of the MIC in June 1947 - Indian Daily Mail, 10 June 1947.

his visit to India in early 1949 attempted to secure an assurance from the Government of India that the acquisition of Federal citizenship would not involve the loss of Indian citizenship.⁽⁴⁶⁾ One possible explanation for this sudden shift of policy was that in the late 1940s, nationalist governments in Burma and Ceylon were expelling Indian migrants who had failed to show sufficient attachment to the local community.⁽⁴⁷⁾

A further important aspect of the proposed new MIC constitution was the inclusion of Pakistanis and Ceylonese in the Party.⁽⁴⁸⁾ In fact, the Pakistani community was not unduly concerned about MIC membership.⁽⁴⁹⁾ In contrast, the attempt to include Ceylonese had serious repercussions. Hitherto the Ceylonese had been admitted to the MIC only as 'Indians' and in this they had to forego their Ceylonese nationality.⁽⁵⁰⁾ As a result only a few Ceylonese had joined the Party, the most prominent being S. Ratnam, the first joint Secretary of the MIC, Swami Satyananda, a member of the Working

(46) Tamil Nesan, 26 February 1949; Singapore Free Press, 26 February 1949. The MIC had formally stated that it was essentially opposed to dual citizenship but until Federal citizenship conferred nationality, Indians were advised to retain Indian nationality. In a special memorandum to the Indian Government in April 1949, the MIC had requested that Indians in Malaya be regarded as a special case and be allowed to retain Indian Nationality since the Federal citizenship legislation was ambiguous and Indians found themselves in an anomalous position with respect to nationality. MIC Memorandum to the Government of India, 27 April 1949 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(47) N. Chakravarti, Indian Minority in Burma, London, 1971, pp. 177-180.

(48) MIC New Draft Constitution, June 1949, p. 1 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur); Indian Daily Mail, 21 June 1949.

(49) Indian Daily Mail, 3 July 1949.

(50) Tamil Nesan, 8 October 1946.

Committee, and N.T.R. Singham. In June 1947, Thivy had made a clumsy attempt to include the Ceylonese in the Party by referring to the individual 'Ceylonese, who aware of his past ties and future destiny, identifies himself with the oneness of the Indian race politically and socially, economically and culturally'.⁽⁵¹⁾

The Ceylonese certainly did not regard themselves in this light. E.E.C. Thuraisingham's caustic advice to Thivy was 'to leave us alone to enjoy the rights we have obtained through our own efforts' and look elsewhere for members.⁽⁵²⁾ Ceylonese in their letters to the Malaya Tribune reminded Indians of the earlier divisions between the two communities in Malaya, particularly the furore that had ensued over Ceylonese representation of Indian interests in the Government councils in the 1930s.⁽⁵³⁾ The Indians too were angered by Thivy's proposal. Critics here ranged from R. Jumabhoy of the Singapore Regional Congress to the Indian Daily Mail and the Tamil Nesan.⁽⁵⁴⁾ The latter believed that so long as the Ceylon Federation of Malaya had not considered it fit to merge or amalgamate with the MIC, 'it would not be proper to include the Ceylonese into the Indian body'.⁽⁵⁵⁾

(51) Indian Daily Mail, 24 June 1947.

(52) Malaya Tribune, 25 June 1947.

(53) Ibid., 7 July 1947, 14 July 1947. For more details of this controversy over Ceylonese representation of Indian interests on the Federal and State Councils in the 1930s, see Arasaratnam, op.cit., p. 87; Ampalavanar, op.cit., pp. 295-297.

(54) Indian Daily Mail, 28 June 1947, 1 July 1947, 7 August 1947; Tamil Nesan, 17 October 1947, 13 March 1948, 24 May 1948.

(55) Tamil Nesan, 7 August 1947.

Therefore, when the MIC attempted to revive the question of Ceylonese membership in 1949, it was re-opening a highly controversial issue. Indeed, it can be argued on several grounds that the MIC would have been well-advised to have avoided this question altogether. First, in 1949 the Party was already involved in a fierce controversy over 'alien' Indians. Second, it seems clear that the inclusion of the Ceylonese in the MIC would add considerably to the number of divisions within the Party. Though at the 1947 Census, Ceylonese had numbered only 22,700, they were divided into Sinhalese, Tamil, Eurasian and Muslim groups.⁽⁵⁶⁾ The majority were English-educated government servants, who avoided active involvement in politics. In the pre-war period a few had accepted nominations to Federal and state councils but the community as a whole had not joined the CIAM or indeed any other Indian organization.⁽⁵⁷⁾ During the Occupation, almost all Ceylonese had remained aloof from the Indian National Army, though some journalists including V. Saravanamuthu, editor of the Straits Echo, Penang, and Francis Cooray, editor of the Malay Mail had been drawn into active association with Bose's movement.⁽⁵⁸⁾ In the immediate post-war period there were clear indications that the Ceylonese were deeply concerned about their political future in Malaya. V. Coomarasamy, a Ceylonese sent to Malaya in 1946, reported that the Malayan Ceylonese were, in general, undecided as to whether they should return to Ceylon or remain in Malaya.⁽⁵⁹⁾

(56) M.V. Del Tufo, Malaya, A Report on the 1947 Census of Population, London, 1949, p. 80.

(57) J.R. Vethavanam had been appointed to the Selangor State Council in 1932 followed by the appointments of Dr. S. Muthuthamby to the Johore State Council and S. Seenivasagam to the Perak State Council in 1935 - Arasaratnam, op.cit., p. 87.

(58) Ramachandra, op.cit., pp. 228-230.

(59) V. Coomarasamy, 'The Position of the Ceylonese in Malaya', report of 15 June 1946, in Tamil Nesan, 18 June 1946.

In this period an attempt was made by E.E.C. Thuraisingham to mobilize the Malayan Ceylonese community, but with little success. His Ceylon Federation of Malaya had branches only in Kuala Lumpur and Taiping.⁽⁶⁰⁾ The Ceylon Federation found it difficult to survive essentially because a large proportion of the community were government servants and therefore forbidden to engage in political activity. Moreover the Ceylon Federation of Malaya was rent by serious internal rivalries between E.E.C. Thuraisingham, the rather dictatorial Chairman, and R.P.S. Rajasooria, a prominent Kuala Lumpur lawyer, and also by conflicts between Tamils and Sinhalese.⁽⁶¹⁾ A crucial source of conflict was undoubtedly Thuraisingham's high-handed attitude. He was a rich lawyer, a protege of Macdonald and an intimate of both Onn bin Jaafar and Tan Cheng Lock. He moved with ease in the corridors of power and cared little about his relationship with his own organization.⁽⁶²⁾ Eventually these divisions became so serious that another Ceylonese political organization was formed, by an alliance of the Selangor Ceylon Tamils Association and a number of disenchanted Sinhalese.⁽⁶³⁾

(60) Registrar of Societies File 451/49, 'Ceylon Federation of Malaya' (Registry of Societies, Kuala Lumpur).

(61) Tamil Nesan, 25 March 1952. A vote of no confidence was passed by the Ceylon Federation of Malaya against its President, E.E.C. Thuraisingham, in March 1952, alleging that he was 'not working for the welfare of the community'. Here the grievances stemmed from his arbitrary method of nominating Ceylonese representatives to the state councils and his repeated postponement of annual elections for office in the party in 1950 and 1951.

(62) He was appointed to the Federal Council in 1947 and became Member for Education in October 1951.

(63) Tamil Nesan, 28 January 1948. This was the Malayan Ceylon Congress led by M.W. Navaratnam. The rivalry between the Malayan Ceylon Congress and the Ceylon Federation of Malaya was to remain a high point in the politics of the community throughout the 1950s. On 5 August 1957, with Independence being imminent, both organizations approached the Alliance for membership there but were rejected and were advised by Tunku Abdul Rahman to unite before seeking partnership with the Alliance. Interview with E.E.C. Thuraisingham, Kuala Lumpur, 20 February 1975.

In view of this, the Congress's crude attempt to entice the Ceylonese into the Party was bound to fail. Moreover, it can be argued that from the point of view of the MIC, the failure was to the Party's benefit. Budh's attempt in 1949 to revive an MIC organization which had become weakened by serious internal divisions, by incorporating within it all 'Indians', would in practice have simply meant the addition to the Party of yet another faction-ridden segment. The MIC Constitution of 1949 set as the principal objectives of the party, a campaign for an independent democratic Malaya, universal adult suffrage, full employment with a 'living' wage, basic civil liberties and Malayan citizenship for all 'loyal' Malaysians.⁽⁶⁴⁾ The reformers also hoped to liberalize the MIC, essentially by increasing the power, and independence of action of the Working Committee at the expense of the President.⁽⁶⁵⁾ This was to be achieved by increasing worker representation on the Working Committee, so making the committee more representative of the party as a whole.⁽⁶⁶⁾ However the encouraging of worker involvement in the MIC hierarchy would prove difficult to achieve, for the trade unions and left-wing parties had already firmly entrenched themselves in the Indian labouring classes and would firmly resist MIC attempts to dislodge them. Moreover, it could be argued that a powerful, virtually dictatorial, Presidency was the only means by which the MIC could achieve a semblance of unity and that by increasing the power of the Working Committee, the Party could disintegrate.

(64) Indian Daily Mail, 22 June 1949.

(65) Ibid.

(66) Ibid.

All regional branches except Selangor, rejected the proposed constitution.⁽⁶⁷⁾ Indeed, the Singapore Regional Congress was so indignant that in July 1949 it began to agitate for autonomy.⁽⁶⁸⁾ The Tamil Press was particularly vehement in denouncing the MIC leaders and their proposed reforms. For example, in the period from 24 June to 7 July 1949, the Indian Daily Mail carried eleven editorials, criticizing the Working Committee which it referred to as the 'Wrecking Committee'.⁽⁶⁹⁾ The Indian Daily Mail could not disguise its disgust at what appeared to be a North Indian-Ceylonese conspiracy to gain influence in a Tamil dominated party.⁽⁷⁰⁾ Budh, a Sikh and N.T.R. Singham, a Ceylonese were clearly the moving forces behind this 'conspiracy'. The Indian Daily Mail also saw dangers in the request of the MIC to the Government for proportional representation in national elections, for it would relegate the Indians to the position of 'a perpetual minority, with all the dangers attendant upon such a condition, instead of absorbing them into the body politic of Malaya and making them a part and parcel of the Malayan nation'.⁽⁷¹⁾

Eventually Budh's leadership came under fire from within the MIC. It was alleged that he was responsible for the deterioration of the Party and for the confusion within the community.⁽⁷²⁾ In October 1949,

(67) Tamil Nesan, 4 July 1949.

(68) Ibid., 5 July 1949.

(69) Indian Daily Mail, 24 June 1949, 27 June 1949, 28 June 1949, 29 June 1949, 30 June 1949, 1 July 1949, 2 July 1949, 3 July 1949, 4 July 1949, 5 July 1949, 6 July 1949 and 7 July 1949.

(70) Ibid., 6 July 1949.

(71) Ibid., 1 July 1949.

(72) Ibid., 5 July 1949.

N.T.R. Singham, President of the Selangor Regional Congress and a close colleague of Budh Singh, resigned over the rejection of the new constitution, and was succeeded by S. Athinahappan, a Chettiar and editor of the Tamil Nesan.⁽⁷³⁾ In early 1950 Budh himself was replaced as MIC President by the conservative Tamil K. Ramanathan, and retiring from Malayan politics, Budh left for India.⁽⁷⁴⁾ In his farewell speech at the fourth annual session of the MIC in Kuala Lumpur in April 1950, Budh lamented that 'there was no word of encouragement, if not of praise from his colleagues that one had been true to the policy of the MIC chalked out by them'.⁽⁷⁵⁾ This was a reference, in particular, to the Party's policy of constitutional boycott between 1948 and 1950.

Therefore the collapse of the movement for a new constitution produced a major realignment within the party, and the departure of Budh and Singham left the way open for increased Tamil influence in the MIC leadership. This transitional atmosphere within the MIC was reflected in a speech by S. Athinahappan in December 1949, in which he stated,

At present Congress is neither right nor left. Once it was associated with leftist bodies. Due to the Emergency some of them have gone into the jungle, some have liquidated themselves. Others have taken new shape. Congress is still the same with its negative attitude. This should change.⁽⁷⁶⁾

It did change. Early 1950 saw the MIC abandon its policy of constitutional boycott and throw itself into the maelstrom of elections and alliances.⁽⁷⁷⁾

(73) Tamil Nesan, 25 December 1949.

(74) Indian Daily Mail, 30 April 1950.

(75) Farewell Address by out-going President at the Fourth Annual Session of the MIC, Kuala Lumpur, 29-30 April 1950 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(76) Tamil Nesan, 25 December 1949.

(77) See Chapter IV, pp. 136-137.

Though in 1949 the MIC had failed to restrict its membership to local-born and domiciled Indians, there is clear evidence that many Malayan Indians of long residence were eager to secure separate representation.⁽⁷⁸⁾ Most notably, in August 1947 the Malayan Indian Association, which purported to represent only domiciled and local-born Indians, was revived.⁽⁷⁹⁾ The MIA had been formed in 1932 by G.V. Thaver in order to organize those Indians who wished to remain permanently in Malaya.⁽⁸⁰⁾ This was at a time when the Depression had thrown into sharp relief the political and economic vulnerability of the community in Malaya. The MIA was led by professionals though it contained a minority of merchants.⁽⁸¹⁾ Its counterpart in Penang was the Penang Malayan Indian Association which had existed since 1924 and was under the strong influence of the Straits Chinese British Association and the Lost Souls Club of Penang.⁽⁸²⁾ The Penang Malayan Indian Association was in fact a rather curious body of Indian Anglophiles, obsessed with proving their local ties, and fearfully opposed to Nationalist Indians.

(78) In 1947, 51.6 per cent of the Indians in the Federation and Singapore were local-born (del Tufo, op.cit., p. 15). In 1957, this ratio of local-born had risen to 65 per cent - Federation of Malaya, The 1957 Census, A Preliminary Report Based on 'First Count Total' Returns, Kuala Lumpur, 1957, p. 15.

(79) Malaya Tribune, 17 August 1947.

(80) The MIA aimed 'to promote and safeguard the general interests, rights and welfare of Malayan Indians and Indians of Malaya'. They defined a 'Malayan Indian as one who has made Malaya (Singapore included) his permanent home or who has qualified himself for Federal citizenship within the meaning of the Federation of Malaya Constitution, 'Rules of the MIA', MIA File 104/50 (Registry of Societies, Kuala Lumpur).

(81) Ibid.

(82) Malaya Tribune, 3 September 1952. See also MIA (Penang) File 1111/49 (Registry of Societies, Kuala Lumpur). For an account of the Straits Chinese British Association, see Lee Yong Hock, 'A History of the Straits Chinese British Association, 1900-1959', B.A. Academic Exercise, University of Malaya in Singapore, 1960. For further details on the Lost Souls Club of Penang, see D. Ooi, 'The English-Speaking Chinese of Penang, 1900-41', M.A. Thesis, University of Malaya, 1967, pp. 87-88.

However the MIA was at a considerable disadvantage compared with the MIC when it came to attracting members.⁽⁸³⁾ This was partly because the 'local-born' or 'domiciled' identity was, in practice, a very vague concept, and partly because political instability in Malaya particularly after 1941 and the continuing appeal of India constantly undermined the loyalty of many Indians to Malaya. In fact the MIA was influential only in Kuala Lumpur, the branch in Penang operating independently.⁽⁸⁴⁾ It would appear that the MIA existed essentially to provide a public platform for an Indian leadership denied a place in the MIC. This was certainly true of G.W. Thaver who opposed the MIC leadership in the late 1940s as he had opposed the CIAM before the war.⁽⁸⁵⁾ To him the MIC and the CIAM were simply nationalists, socialists and to all appearances blind followers of Nehru and the Indian National Congress.

(83)

<u>MIA</u>		<u>MIC</u>	
date	membership	date	membership
29.9.49.	100	31.8.51.	7,984
25.1.50.	120	31.8.52.	12,833
31.8.51.	108	30.6.53.	20,187
31.8.52.	108	31.3.54.	19,820
30.9.53.	141	31.12.54.	27,200
31.12.54.	220	31.12.55.	26,050
31.12.55.	193	25.10.56.	40,000
31.12.56.	223	31.12.57.	44,000
31.12.57.	105	29.9.58.	44,000

Source: MIA File 104/50; MIC File 114/58 (Registry of Societies Kuala Lumpur).

(84) 'Inspection Report of officer of the Registry of Societies, December 1955', in MIA File 104/50 (Registry of Societies, Kuala Lumpur).

(85) Interview with S. Govindaraj, 16 January 1975.

The MIA played a significant role only in agitations for land settlements on behalf of domiciled Indians.⁽⁸⁶⁾ On all other issues it was the party of compromise and moderation. It insisted on exposing what it saw as MIC dogmatism over citizenship and nationality.⁽⁸⁷⁾ The MIA was a party dominated by one man, its creator, G.V. Thaver, and inevitably it projected Thaver's ideology. He was consistently loyal to Onn, in the IMP, in the National Conference and in the Party Negara. The MIA echoed Onn and the National Conference in arguing that Federal elections should be delayed until 1956, and therefore that independence should be postponed.⁽⁸⁸⁾ It was argued that delay would give the local-born additional opportunities to assert themselves in Malayan politics.

The real influence of the MIA can be said to have lain in the fact that it acted as a check on the policies of the MIC. Important here was Padi Krishnan who was active in the MIA until September 1951.⁽⁸⁹⁾ For example, as the MIA took a firm stand on non-communalism and in this it refused even to support the campaign for reserved seats, the Indian community was made to think carefully before it embarked on any communal affiliation.⁽⁹⁰⁾ If the MIA added to the divisions within the

(86) One of Thaver's land-settlement projects was the Ramnathapuram Settlement started in 1932 near Port Dickson in Negri Sembilan. See R.K. Jain, 'Ramnathapuram Experiment: Paradigm of an Estate - Farm - Factory Community in Malaya', Proceedings of the First International Conference - Seminar of Tamil Studies, Kuala Lumpur, January 1968, vol. 1, pp. 164-196.

(87) Straits Times, 22 February 1955. A senior official of the MIA, K.V. Thaver, who was also President of the Kuala Lumpur Party Negara, advised Malays in February 1955 to oppose the principle of jus soli and to reserve automatic citizenship and nationality only for those born in the country and with a long residence there. This was a reactionary stand, particularly in the light of the controversies over citizenship in Indian and Chinese political circles in this period. Sevika, 13 February 1955.

(88) Tamil Nesan, 4 October 1953.

(89) Padi Krishnan resigned from the MIA in September 1951 following a clash with G.V. Thaver. Tamil Nesan, 9 September 1951.

(90) See Chapter V, pp. 160-161.

the community, it can on the other side be said to have engendered a more thoughtful approach amongst the Indian leadership. The usefulness of the MIA in this respect faded in the mid-1950s when the MIC became more positive and indeed communal. At the annual general meeting of the MIA in February 1955, it was resolved to dissolve the organization as a political party but to continue as a social welfare body.⁽⁹¹⁾ Its members were permitted to join other organizations including the MIC.⁽⁹²⁾ The MIA finally dissolved itself in April 1959.⁽⁹³⁾ It was in the final analysis a party of G.V. Thaver and when he retired from politics, his organization inevitably faded.⁽⁹⁴⁾

It is ironic that the MIC, which aimed to represent all Indians in Malaya, in fact prompted the formation of splinter organizations when it aligned itself with extremist parties in the late 1940s. For example, the alliance of the MIC with the AMCJA in 1948 caused conservative professional and merchant Indians to seek an alternative political organization. Moreover, between 1948-1950 when the MIC was engaged in its constitutional boycott, the Indian councillors though formally representing Indian interests in the councils, were excluded from the MIC, the major Indian organization. Moreover, far too often, the MIC and the trade unions by their obsession with socialism and workers' politics, gave the impression that the Indian community was composed solely of estate labourers. Hence the years

(91) Sevika, 13 February 1955.

(92) Ibid.

(93) Tamil Nesan, 27 April 1959.

(94) G.V. Thaver: born December 1895 in Kuala Lumpur; educated in Kuala Lumpur; Cooperative Officer, Negri Sembilan; President, Negri Sembilan Indian Association, MIA, and Tamils Representative Council, Member, Kuala Lumpur Municipal Council and State War Executive Council, Selangor.

1947 to early 1950 saw a sudden upsurge of new political ventures by the Indian elite who were aware that there was a disconcerting absence of Indian political leaders who were acceptable to the British.

A group of prominent Indians led by R. Ramani and Major A.S. Roman made a few clumsy attempts to form a separate political body in 1949 but were easily blocked by Budh and Thivy.⁽⁹⁵⁾ However in July 1950 with considerable pomp, the Indian councillors led by Ramani and supported by the Indian Chamber of Commerce and certain Sikh associations, formed the Federation of Indian Organizations (FIO) as a parallel organization to the MIC.⁽⁹⁶⁾ Their aim was to bring into a federation all the existing Indian organisations. It was not intended to replace the MIC or indeed any other party, but rather to provide an organizational framework within which all Indian bodies would work as best suited their specific interests.⁽⁹⁷⁾ Representatives from the MIC attended the inaugural meeting of the FIO in July 1950 but they opposed the new body.⁽⁹⁸⁾ Subsequently the MIC held a protest meeting condemning the FIO as being detrimental to communal unity, and as an 'apple of discord'.⁽⁹⁹⁾ This protest meeting was supported by the MIA and by large numbers of Chettiars and Tamil businessmen.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ It should be noted in passing that despite occasional disenchantment with the policies and actions of the MIC among the Chettiars and the Tamils, these communities remained intensely loyal to the Congress and were largely responsible for the failure of other Indian political bodies to challenge effectively the MIC.

(95) Tamil Nesan, 15 February 1949, 17 April 1949.

(96) Ibid., 4 July 1950.

(97) Ibid.

(98) Tamil Nesan, 23 July 1950.

(99) Indian Daily Mail, 26 July 1950.

(100) Ibid.

The response of the Indian Daily Mail to the FIO was predictably self-righteous. It condemned the new organization as the 'conspiracy of the thirteen musketeers'.⁽¹⁰¹⁾ Its denunciation of V.M.N. Menon, one of the founders of the FIO was particularly brutal. He had been a committee member of the MIC in 1946-47, Vice-President of the MIA until 1950 and was now active in the FIO. To the Indian Daily Mail he was a political mercenary.⁽¹⁰²⁾ The FIO brought together an impressive array of conservative Indian leaders. Its initial objective of admitting whole organizations, rather than individuals, had to be swiftly modified for the response from other Indian organizations was very poor. As late as September 1951 only nine organizations had declared their allegiance to the FIO.⁽¹⁰³⁾ From May 1951 the Federation began to admit individual members.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ The FIO also failed to offer a substantially alternative policy to that of the MIC. This was shown by its memorandum to Oliver Lyttleton in December 1951, which differed from that of the MIC, only over its proposals for citizenship.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾

In 1951 the FIO attempted to emphasize its local orientation by supporting conscription of all males in Malaya between the ages of 18 - 25.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ This was a burning issue for the Indian community for it was being accused of sending its young males back to India in order to avoid conscription. At the same time the local forces were under severe strain as a result of the Emergency. This patriotic stand of the FIO was therefore unlikely to prove popular in the Indian community

(101) Ibid., 5 July 1950, Editorial, 'The Thirteen Musketeers', in reference to the 13 Indian Councillors and merchants who promoted the FIO.

(102) Ibid.

(103) Indian Daily Mail, 3 September 1951.

(104) Straits Times, 2 September 1951.

(105) See Chapter V, p. 147.

(106) Straits Times, 2 September 1951.

particularly when it was known that Ramani was zealously retaining his Indian nationality and passport.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ The FIO did not seek support from the Indian labouring classes. In fact the two trade union representatives in the Federal Council, P.P. Narayanan and M.P. Rajagopal, who attended the inaugural meeting of the FIO were not considered for office in the party.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾

The FIO was a weak organization. It was acceptable to the authorities largely because it contained prominent Indians but it never caused a major political realignment within the community. Like the MIC and the MIA, the FIO adhered to non-communalism which in practice meant for the FIO an irresistible urge to support Onn in the IMP, the National Conference and the Party Negara. The FIO achieved political importance only because its leading members constituted the majority of nominated Indian representatives on the Federal and State Councils.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ It faded with the arrival of elections and mass politics. In 1959 the FIO was dissolved and Ramani retired from politics to concentrate on his law practice.⁽¹¹⁰⁾

(107) Interview with S.Govindaraj, 2 March 1975.

(108) Indian Daily Mail, 5 July 1950.

(109) The thirteen Indians who promoted the FIO in July 1950 were R. Ramani, V.M.N. Menon, M.P. Rajagopal and P.P. Narayanan (members of the Federal Legislative Council), S.O.K. Ubaidullah, Dr. J. Samuel (Negri Sembilan State Councillors), Dr. N.K. Menon (Penang Settlement Councillor), S. Shanmugam (Member, Malacca Settlement Council), C.J. Doshi, R.K. Pannikkar, C.M. Seth (prominent Indian merchants) and S. Seenikatti and A.S. Nair. Indian Daily Mail, 4 July 1950.

(110) R. Ramani: Brahmin; born in Madras; educated in Madras University; lawyer, partner of legal firm, Braddell and Ramani; Later Malaysian Representative to the United Nations and achieved fame in the legal dispute with Philippines over Sabah in East Malaysia.

(iii)

For the Indian community the dangers inherent in its political divisions came into sharp focus as the country moved towards its first elections in 1951. In April of that year, Padi Krishnan, one of the few political realists in the community, began to agitate for the amalgamation of the three major political parties, the MIC, MIA and FIO and preliminary discussions were held between the three Presidents that same month.⁽¹¹¹⁾ The MIC working committee met in late April and agreed to accept amalgamation.⁽¹¹²⁾ On 13 May a meeting of fifteen representatives from the MIC, MIA and FIO agreed that the proposed new body would include both organizations and individuals.⁽¹¹³⁾ This was in order to accommodate the FIO which at that point had only organizational membership.

A major difficulty in these discussions was that the MIC had the highest membership and hence demanded special privileges.⁽¹¹⁴⁾ But despite this, Devaser of the MIC, Ramani of the FIO and Padi Krishnan of the MIA strongly supported the merger. Unexpectedly, the Singapore Indian Association also pressed for merger, perhaps because its President, R. Jumabhoy, who had withdrawn from the Singapore Regional Congress in August 1947, was now eager to regain political prominence through the new organization.⁽¹¹⁵⁾ The negotiators agreed not to make any distinction between citizens and non-citizens when it came to

(111) Malay Mail, 22 April 1951; Indian Daily Mail, 27 April 1951. See also letter from S. Govindaraj to K.L. Devaser, 16 April 1951 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(112) Minutes of MIC working committee meeting, Kuala Lumpur, 29 April 1951 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(113) Indian Daily Mail, 14 May 1951.

(114) The MIC had a membership of 20,000, while the MIA had only 108 members and the FIO included nine organizations. Tamil Nesan, 31 August 1951.

(115) Indian Daily Mail, 15 May 1951.

membership.⁽¹¹⁶⁾ On this point, pressure had to be applied to the MIA for initially that party had insisted that if the new organization was to be essentially a political body, then membership and voting rights should be restricted to those who had made Malaya their home.⁽¹¹⁷⁾ However if it was to be an organization with prominent social functions, then all Indians and Indian organizations, irrespective of loyalty, could be included.⁽¹¹⁸⁾ But Ramani was adamantly opposed to any such distinctions being made between citizens and non-citizens.⁽¹¹⁹⁾

The Tamil Nesan supported the merger but the Indian Daily Mail was an ardent opponent, though its opposition was based more on a paranoid fear of Ramani and G.V. Thaver, than on a clear analysis of the benefits and disadvantages of the issue.⁽¹²⁰⁾ Strangely the Indian Daily Mail interpreted the merger issue as a struggle between citizens and non-citizens and appears to have believed that non-citizens would not be allowed equal rights with citizens in the new party. In an emotional outburst, it pleaded that the MIC should be saved 'not merely for the sake of non-citizens who form the large bulk of the community but particularly for the sake of the citizens who are ignorant and are being misled by their self-styled leaders. For when a crisis comes, nobody is going to see whether you have a citizenship certificate or not and an Indian will continue to look

(116) Tamil Nesan, 31 August 1951.

(117) Letter dated 12 August 1951 from Padi Krishnan of the MIA, in Straits Times, 13 August 1951. See also letter from General Secretary, MIC to all branches, 16 April 1951 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(118) Straits Times, 13 August 1951.

(119) Malay Mail, 2 September 1951.

(120) Tamil Nesan, 15 May 1951; Indian Daily Mail, 16 May 1951.

an Indian whether he becomes a citizen or remains a non-citizen'.⁽¹²¹⁾
 The Indian Daily Mail attacked the MIC leaders, particularly Devaser.⁽¹²²⁾
 The Singapore Regional Congress, slavishly following the Indian Daily Mail, also opposed merger and threatened to secede if the proposed merger became a reality.⁽¹²³⁾

At the fifth annual session of the MIC in June 1951, it was agreed that the membership of the proposed new body should be restricted to individuals.⁽¹²⁴⁾ This decision reflected pressure from influential MIC branches in Selangor and Perak.⁽¹²⁵⁾ The insistence on individual membership inevitably produced an impasse in the negotiations between the three organizations, because it implied the exclusion of the FIO, and Ramani accused the MIC of sabotaging the merger.⁽¹²⁶⁾ Relations between the FIO and the MIC deteriorated further when in December 1951 each organization sent a separate memorandum to Oliver Lyttleton, the Colonial Secretary. The following May, Devaser attacked the FIO at

(121) Indian Daily Mail, 16 May 1951, Editorial, 'Save the MIC from the Executioners'.

(122) Ibid., 22 May 1951.

(123) Ibid., 7 June 1951. This threat by the Singapore Congress to secede from the MIC continued into late 1951 when serious internal schisms wrecked the party and the leadership considered secession as a possible solution to end these rifts. In 1954 the Singapore Congress became increasingly involved in the politics of the island and thereby became estranged from the growing communalism in the MIC on the mainland. Finally with the attainment of Independence in August 1957, a formal break was made but the Singapore branch found it difficult to survive as an ethnic political organization in the highly competitive and ideologically infused political atmosphere of Singapore in the late 1950s. By 1959 the Singapore Congress merely survived as a rump faction within the Indian reformist organizations on the island.

(124) Minutes of the Fifth Annual Session of the MIC, Johore Bharu, 5-10 June 1951 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur); Tamil Nesan, 23 June 1951.

(125) See MIC File 'Merger, further replies from branch Congresses to the circular by S. Govindaraj' (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur). Letter from Devaser to Ramani and G.V. Thaver, 5 August 1951 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(126) Straits Times, 13 August 1951. See also Ramani's reply to MIC President, in MIC Annual Report, June 1951 - May 1952, p. 5. Ramani complained, 'It [primary membership] cuts the ground under our feet as our membership at the moment is only organizational'.

the MIC annual session. 'The Congress wants uniform rights for all Malayans. The FIO has been asking for special rights for Indians and Ceylonese being British subjects ... the Congress is taking a far sighted policy and it will be fatal to this country if the people go on having special rights exclusive to themselves'.⁽¹²⁷⁾

The merger can be said to have failed for the following reasons. First, it attracted little support from within the major party, the MIC. Devaser, Balakrishnan, President of Penang Regional Congress and S. Govindaraj, General Secretary of the MIC, were the only influential members of the Party who favoured merger.⁽¹²⁸⁾ Moreover opposition from the influential Tamil Press in Singapore, which had an almost fanatical dislike of Ramani and Thaver, made it almost certain that the Singapore Regional Congress would secede from the MIC rather than participate in the proposed merger. Second, as has been demonstrated earlier, there were fundamental differences of ideology and organizational structure between the MIC, MIA and FIO. Third, there were pronounced personality differences between Devaser, Ramani and Thaver. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, politics in Malaya in the early 1950s was already seriously complicated by a search for political alliances between the various communal groups. For example, the MIC was being wooed by the seemingly impressive Dato Onn and his IMP, and while this courtship continued, the pressure on the MIC to merge with the FIO and the MIA was considerably reduced. In the late 1950s as the prestige of the MIC grew, the other two Indian organizations were eclipsed and finally disappeared.

(127) Presidential Address at Sixth Annual Session of the MIC, Klang, 31 May 1952 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(128) Interview with S. Govindaraj, 2 March 1975.

(iv)

As already stated, in the period under review, the MIC was a severely fragmented organization, though to some extent this simply reflected the divided and politically volatile character of the community it purported to represent. This fragmentation can perhaps be most clearly demonstrated, and its major determinants most easily uncovered by a review of the successive MIC Presidents in this period - their careers, personalities and the policies they pursued. The first President of the MIC, John Thivy, was local-born. He was educated in Ipoh, Madras and London and had a law practice in Ipoh in the 1930s. During the Occupation, he was attracted to the Indian National Army and thence, in 1946, into the MIC.⁽¹²⁹⁾ His term as President coincided with a period of relative unity in the Indian community.⁽¹³⁰⁾ Thivy was a forceful, though not controversial character, and he successfully stamped his personality on the MIC. During his Presidency, the MIC acquired the socialist, nationalist and non-communal character that was to mark its outlook, to a greater or lesser degree, in the 1950s.⁽¹³¹⁾

His successor, Budh Singh, President from 1947-1950, was, like Thivy, a follower of Nehru and the Indian National Congress. However under his influence, the MIC became increasingly left-wing and this provoked the first major ideological rift within the organization.

(129) J. Thivy was initially President of the Perak Indian Independence League in 1942 but was soon made Chairman of the Malayan branch of the Indian Independence League and Secretary in Bose's Cabinet. His rapid promotions were a reflection of his flexibility in contrast to the dogmatism of N. Raghavan and S.C. Goho in the Indian Independence League. J.A. Thivy, A Short History of the Indian Independence Movement, Hanoi, 1945, pp. 6-16 (photostat copy in the University of Malaya Library, Kuala Lumpur).

(130) S.K. Chettur, Malayan Adventure, Mangalore, 1948, p. 254.

(131) Indian Daily Mail, 9 July 1950, 13 July 1950.

The opposition to Budh Singh came mainly from the MIC branch in Malacca, which was dominated by conservative Chettiars and Tamils, the Negri Sembilan Regional Congress, and the Tamil Nesan.⁽¹³²⁾ This opposition was prompted essentially by the Party's boycott of the Federation Constitution from 1948. Indeed, the Malacca branch, having failed to persuade the leadership to end the boycott, resigned en bloc from the MIC in August 1948.⁽¹³³⁾ Discontent over this issue was also evident in the Negri Sembilan branch.⁽¹³⁴⁾ There the main agitation came from the Indian councillors who had been expelled from the MIC in mid-1948 for retaining their Government appointments.⁽¹³⁵⁾

Budh's leadership also faced serious opposition in Singapore where, in July 1947, R. Jumabhoy, President of the Singapore Regional Congress and a member of the Singapore Legislative Assembly supported a Bill proposing elections to the Legislature.⁽¹³⁶⁾ The MIC leadership considered this Bill inadequate, since it provided for the election of only six out of the twenty-three members, it restricted the franchise to British subjects and it did not envisage the union of Singapore with the mainland.⁽¹³⁷⁾ Jumabhoy was also opposed to the hartal of 20 August 1947, though the MIC leadership strongly favoured it.⁽¹³⁸⁾ Indeed, four days before the hartal took place, Jumabhoy resigned from the Congress. However Jumabhoy's departure did not quell the controversies within the Singapore branch and a significant faction decided to register party members on Singapore's electoral roll.⁽¹³⁹⁾

(132) Tamil Nesan, 11 April 1948, 5 August 1948; Malaya Tribune, 21 July 1948.

(133) Tamil Nesan, 24 August 1948.

(134) Ibid.

(135) Ibid.

(136) Tamil Murasu, 29 July 1947.

(137) Yeo Kim Wah, Political Development in Singapore, 1945-55, Singapore, 1973, p. 252.

(138) See Chapter IV, p. 131.

(139) Indian Daily Mail, 1 March 1948.

This was in defiance of a decision by the All Malayan Indian Congress Committee not to participate in the elections.⁽¹⁴⁰⁾

Budh's dogmatism was in a large measure responsible for defections of prominent MIC figures from the Party and for the continuing internal rifts. By 1950 there was considerable internal pressure for a change in leadership and policy. At the fourth annual session of the MIC, there was a barbed conflict between Budh Singh and K. Ramanathan, the President-elect over the constitutional boycott, the result of which was a decision to abandon Budh's policy and return to active politics.⁽¹⁴¹⁾ Ramanathan argued that henceforth the MIC would cooperate with any political party, including the MCA and the UMNO, to consider matters of common interest.⁽¹⁴²⁾ The Indian Daily Mail suspected that this reversal of policy was due essentially to the rising influence of Chettiars and the merchant élite.⁽¹⁴³⁾ It is worth noting that apart from the abandonment of the constitutional boycott, this session debated only an Accounts Bill which required businessmen to keep their accounts in English or Romanized Malay, an issue which seriously affected Chettiar businessmen.⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ Moreover, O.A.R. Arunasalam Chettiar whose personal feud with Budh Singh was notorious in MIC circles, used his influence over the Chettiar dominated branches of

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- (140) Minutes of All Malayan Indian Congress Committee meeting, Kuala Lumpur, 29 February 1948 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).
- (141) Minutes of Fourth Annual Session of the MIC, 29- 30 April 1950 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur); Indian Daily Mail, 8 May 1950.
- (142) Minutes of All Malayan Indian Congress Committee Meeting, Kuala Lumpur, 19 November 1950 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).
- (143) Indian Daily Mail, 12 May 1950.
- (144) Ibid. Minutes of Fourth Annual Session of the MIC, 29 - 30 April 1950 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

Malacca, Negri Sembilan and Selangor to gather support for Ramanathan. (145)

A further major factor accounting for the chronic divisions in the MIC in this period was its organizational structure. This ensured that a relatively few branches were able to achieve a disproportionately large representation on the All Malayan Indian Congress Committee and the Working Committee. (146) In this way they secured easy access to the President and to the inner circles of the MIC. For example, in 1950, five out of the nine members of the All Malayan Indian Congress Committee were from Selangor. (147)

It should also be noted that of the six Presidents who have served the MIC in the period 1946-77, four have been from Selangor. (148)

The very close links between the President, the All Malayan Indian Congress Committee and the Working Committee, tended to isolate

(145) Letter from A. Balakrishnan to S. Govindaraj, 25 December 1953 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur). O.A.R. Arunasalam Chettiar: born in India; came to Malaya in the 1920s. In 1933 he formed the Chettiars Merchants Association. In 1936 he founded the Tiruvalluvar Library in Malaya, which was a focus of Tamil literary movements in Malaya. In 1938 he started the Tamil Kody, as a monthly journal and later it appeared as a weekly paper. The emphasis in the Tamil Kody was on a Tamil cultural and literary revival. In the late 1930s the paper carried a regular column on labour problems edited by R.H. Nathan, the trade union leader and Tamil Nesan editor who was banished following the Klang Strikes in 1941. O.A.R. Arunasalam Chettiar was also active in the Indian Independence League and was a founder member of the Malacca Congress in 1946. In 1950 he was crucial in the organizing of the Tamil Pannai, an active literary and cultural body. He was a close friend of Tan Cheng Lock.

(146) See Draft Proposals for the MIC, August 1946, p.5 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(147) In 1950 the All Malayan Indian Congress Committee Members were S. Govindaraj, V. Manickavasagam, K.L. Devaser, K. Gurupatham, Gurubaksh Singh Sambhi all of whom were from Selangor, while A. Balakrishnan (Penang), Megappan (Johore), Fred David (Perak) and Kehar Singh (Negri Sembilan) were the remaining members. Annual Report of the MIC May 1950 - May 1951, p. 2 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(148) J. Thivy, 1946-47 - Perak.
Budh Singh, 1947-50 - Selangor.
K. Ramanathan, 1950-51 - Selangor.
K.L. Devaser, 1951-55 - Selangor.
V.T. Sambanthan, 1955-73 - Perak.
V. Manickavasagam, 1973 - Selangor.

the President from the ordinary membership and to bestow a dictatorial character to the leadership. This was particularly evident during the Presidencies of Devaser and Sambanthan. In short, criticism of the leadership from the lower levels of the MIC was constantly stifled and contained. However, inevitably the pressure of criticism would build up over several years and periodically explode upon an unsuspecting President and his sycophantic colleagues.

For example, during his Presidency, between May 1951 - May 1955, Devaser came increasingly into conflict with the Tamil dominated branches of Penang and Singapore.⁽¹⁴⁹⁾ Indeed, in December 1953, these branches attempted to organize an opposition to Devaser's re-election as President.⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ In this they exploited an earlier court conviction of Devaser for providing false evidence in a Chinese application for citizenship.⁽¹⁵¹⁾ Devaser, aware of these machinations, sought to undermine the dissident Balakrishnan faction in Penang, by enlisting the aid of Dr. N.K. Menon and wealthy Chettiars in Penang and Province Wellesley.⁽¹⁵²⁾ With their support, he engineered the election of Jagjit Singh as President of the Penang branch. However Jagjit Singh was certainly no supporter of the MIC President and later he was to prove a considerable annoyance to Devaser.⁽¹⁵³⁾

The contest for the MIC Presidency in April 1954 was a heated one. Originally there were eleven candidates of whom four withdrew before the elections took place. Only four contested the final ballot.⁽¹⁵⁴⁾

(149) See Chapter VII, pp. 241-242.

(150) Letter from A. Balakrishnan to S. Govindaraj, 31 December 1953 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(151) Ibid.

(152) Tamil Nesan, 28 January 1954. Letter from A. Balakrishnan to S. Govindaraj, 13 January 1954 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(153) See Chapter VII, p. 241.

(154) Tamil Nesan, 15 January 1954. A. Balakrishnan (Penang), Gurubaksh Singh Sambhi (Selangor), Jagjit Singh (Penang), Devaser (Selangor) were the four contenders.

In fact Devaser was able to retain his post though only twenty-eight of the fifty-two branches actually voted.⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ Indeed Devaser was re-elected essentially because he had the support of the Selangor branch, particularly the powerful Bungsar-Brickfields Congress.⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ However Devaser's re-election did not stem the rising tide of Tamil resentment against him. The President's suspension of Jagjit Singh and V.J. Somasundaram from the Party, simply for criticising him on the reserved seats issue, led an All Malayan Indian Congress Committee meeting in August 1954 to censure Devaser's 'dictatorial actions'.⁽¹⁵⁷⁾

In the election for the MIC Presidency in May 1955, Devaser's protégés, V. Manickavasagam and Kehar Singh were badly beaten. The new President was V.T. Sambanthan who narrowly defeated A. Balakrishnan.⁽¹⁵⁸⁾ One of the first actions of the new President was to announce a change in the MIC representatives on the Alliance National Council. The complaints against the existing representatives were that they were mostly Selangor nominees, and that they had failed to protect Indian interests in the Alliance.⁽¹⁵⁹⁾ These retiring representatives were predominantly North Indian, their replacements were Tamil.⁽¹⁶⁰⁾

Sambanthan was soon facing difficulties. First, he had a tempestuous relationship with the MIC Youth and with the Bungsar-Brickfields branch throughout his entire period of office. Second, barely six months after assuming the Presidency, Sambanthan was confronted with a crisis in

(155) Tamil Nesan, 12 April 1954.

(156) Ibid.

(157) Minutes of the All Malayan Indian Congress Committee Meeting, Kuala Lumpur, 26 August 1954 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(158) Straits Times, 1 May 1955; Tamil Nesan, 2 May 1955.

(159) Tamil Nesan, 2 May 1955.

(160) MIC representatives on the Alliance National Council, 1954-55 were A.B. Dings (Malayalee), K. Gurupatham (Tamil), Kehar Singh (Punjabi Sikh), Gurdial Singh (Punjabi Sikh), Devaser (Punjabi Hindu), V. Manickavasagam (Tamil). The new nominees were K. Ramanathan (Tamil), A. Balakrishnan (Tamil), V.T. Sambanthan (Tamil). Tamil Nesan, 24 May 1955.

Perak where elections for the state council were due in December 1955.⁽¹⁶¹⁾ The Alliance awarded the MIC only one out of the twenty candidatures for the elections and in disgust, the Perak Regional Congress Chairman resigned from the Party.⁽¹⁶²⁾ Moreover, two MIC members who had hoped to contest the elections threatened that henceforth they would stand as Independents, though Sambanthan ultimately forced them to withdraw.⁽¹⁶³⁾ As a result of this, Sambanthan alienated an influential group in the Ipoh MIC who later joined forces with the Perak Progressive Party in Ipoh to challenge the Alliance in that state.⁽¹⁶⁴⁾

Then in early 1956, Sambanthan was criticised by factions within the MIC for compromising the Party's position in the Alliance memo to the Reid Constitutional Commission.⁽¹⁶⁵⁾ The President was accused of failing to insist on jus soli and multi-lingualism in education and for failing to insist on an amendment of the Malays' special privileges clause.⁽¹⁶⁶⁾ Sambanthan's failure to maintain the support of the branches and his failure to protect Indian interests in the Alliance were to mar his political career. More seriously, Sambanthan's failure to secure MIC interests in the Alliance, frustrated factions within the MIC so severely that eventually they defied the MIC and supported G.V. Thaver of the MIA

(161) Tamil Nesan, 20 December 1955.

(162) Ibid.

(163) Ibid., 31 December 1955.

(164) See Moore, op.cit., pp. 240-241.

(165) Straits Times, 20 April 1956; Tamil Nesan, 20 June 1956.

(166) Straits Times, 20 April 1956.

in sending a separate memo to the Colonial Secretary asking for the original recommendations of the Reid Commission to be implemented.⁽¹⁶⁷⁾

In spite of the alienation of MIC Youth and factions in Selangor, Perak and Penang, Sambanthan was re-elected President in April 1956.⁽¹⁶⁸⁾ However, after the election Devaser and MIC Youth continued to attack Sambanthan, criticising him for being obsessive over temperance reform, yet neglecting the serious political issues of language and citizenship.⁽¹⁶⁹⁾ The feud between Devaser and Sambanthan became particularly bitter in August 1956 when Sambanthan dropped Devaser from the list of MIC nominees to the Alliance Committee on the Constitution, replacing him with K. Ramanathan.⁽¹⁷⁰⁾ As Devaser was the Alliance nominated member in the Federal Council, his removal from the Committee was impolitic if not irregular. The feud between Devaser and Sambanthan eventually led to the suspension of the former from the MIC. In addition, the All Malayan Indian Congress Committee warned that 'the objectionable activities of Devaser and the Selangor MIC Executive Committee will be

(167) Tamil Nesan, 29 May 1957. This memo, dated 9 May 1957, was signed by the All Malaya Chettiars Chamber of Commerce, the Malayan Tamils Association, the MIA and by prominent individuals from Selangor. The Reid Commission's original recommendations had included 1) that Malay privileges should be reviewed within fifteen years with a view towards abolition of these preferential rights and 2) that Federal citizenship would be synonymous with Commonwealth citizenship and this was highly favourable to Indians. (Report of the Federation of Malaya, Constitutional Commission, Kuala Lumpur, 1957, pp. 87, 183 Article 157). Hence the MIA preferred these above recommendations to certain of the proposals in the final Merdeka Constitution formulated by the Working Committee between March - May 1957 - Straits Times, 2 May 1957.

(168) Straits Times, 29 April 1956.

(169) Tamil Nesan, 2 June 1956.

(170) Straits Times, 5 August 1956.

investigated'.⁽¹⁷¹⁾ In this investigation Sambanthan marshalled sufficient support from the rural branches of Selangor to suppress the volatile Bungsar-Brickfields branch.⁽¹⁷²⁾ However, Devaser's political career came to an end in June 1959 when he resigned from the MIC because of 'the unconstitutional manner' of the party.⁽¹⁷³⁾

In February 1957 factions within the MIC decided to challenge Sambanthan in the forthcoming Presidential elections.⁽¹⁷⁴⁾ The opposition was led by K. Annamalai, V. Manickavasagam and K. Dass, all from Selangor.⁽¹⁷⁵⁾ However Sambanthan retained the Presidency.⁽¹⁷⁶⁾ It should also be noted the K. Annamalai was behind a hostile reception given to Sambanthan when he visited the Ipoh branch in 1959.⁽¹⁷⁷⁾ At the same time, the Perak MIC passed a motion of no confidence in the President.⁽¹⁷⁸⁾ But having stirred up considerable hostility towards Sambanthan in the President's home state, K. Annamalai then defected to the Peoples Progressive Party (PPP) and stood as a candidate for the PPP against Sambanthan in the 1959 Parliamentary elections.⁽¹⁷⁹⁾

(171) Indian Daily Mail, 26 September 1956.

(172) Ibid.

(173) Singapore Tiger Standard, 24 June 1959; Moore, op.cit., p. 256.

(174) Tamil Nesan, 2 February 1957.

(175) Ibid.

(176) Ibid., 5 April 1957.

(177) Straits Times, 26 April 1959; Moore, op.cit., p. 253.

(178) Straits Times, 26 April 1959.

(179) K.J. Ratnam, Communalism and the Political Process in Malaya, p. 223. The Perak Progressive Party changed its name to Peoples Progressive Party of Malaya on 15 March 1956. Straits Times, 16 March 1956.

Sambanthan won, helped by the efficient Alliance elections machine and by defections from the PPP itself.⁽¹⁸⁰⁾

The most critical rift within the MIC occurred in December 1957 over local elections in the Bungsar ward. The local MIC officials were disappointed with the Alliance nominee for the seat, I. Gurdial Singh, and the Alliance leadership suspected them of covertly aiding the Labour Party candidate, V. David.⁽¹⁸¹⁾ The primary suspects were K. Gurupatham, President of the Bungsar MIC, K. Annamalai, a Working Committee member and A. Tharmalingam, Secretary of the Selangor MIC.⁽¹⁸²⁾ Indeed an angered Selangor UMNO demanded the expulsion of the MIC from the Alliance.⁽¹⁸³⁾ Sambanthan was in some measure responsible for this crisis, for his conflict with the MIC Youth and his lack of rapport with the Selangor MIC had led him to foist the hapless I. Gurdial Singh

(180) Moore, op.cit., p. 278.

1959 Federal Elections.

Sungei Siput (Perak):

Total electorate	17,157
Malays	5,962
Chinese	8,427
Indians	2,768
V.T. Sambanthan .. Indian .. Alliance ..	7,317 votes
K. Annamalai .. Indian .. PPP ..	4,514 votes
Choy Kok Kuan .. Chinese .. Independent ..	148 votes
Turn-out	70 per cent

Source: K.J. Ratnam, Communalism and the Political Process in Malaya, p. 223.

(181) Sunday Times, 5 January 1958. V. David had been a member of the MIC and of the Selangor Labour Party till 1954. In fact he attended the eighth annual session of the MIC in April 1954 as a delegate of the Klang Road MIC branch. But in July 1953 the Labour Party introduced the regulation that members should not belong to other political parties, so David resigned from the MIC in mid-1954.

(182) Sunday Times, 5 January 1958; Means, op.cit., p. 209.

(183) Straits Times, 20 August 1958.

on the Selangor MIC in the first place. Sambanthan, having failed to contain the MIC Youth, finally abolished it in June 1958.⁽¹⁸⁴⁾ As a result after 1958 the troublesome Bungsar-Brickfields branch lost its influence in the MIC.⁽¹⁸⁵⁾ From 1954-1958 the branch, working closely with the MIC Youth, had been a significant pressure group in the party. It had succeeded in forcing the leadership to demand more concessions from the Alliance, a success which rarely pleased the UMNO and frequently disturbed the unadventurous MIC leadership.

The strained relationship between the Bungsar-Brickfields branch and the MIC leadership was largely responsible for the defeats suffered by the Party in all the elections in Bungsar between 1955-1958.⁽¹⁸⁶⁾ In December 1958, the officials of the Bungsar-Brickfields branch led by V.J. Somasundaram, resigned en bloc from the Party in frustration at the leadership's lack of political vigour.⁽¹⁸⁷⁾ The conflict between the Bungsar-Brickfields branch and the leadership had one further important consequence. It resulted in the drift of a significant proportion of the Indian working class in Selangor away from the MIC and towards the Labour Party.⁽¹⁸⁸⁾

(184) Tamil Nesan, 26 June 1958.

(185) Straits Times, 19 May 1958.

(186) Moore, op.cit., p. 249.

(187) Malay Mail, 2 December 1958.

(188) Vasil, op.cit., p. 131. K.J. Ratnam, The Malayan Parliamentary Election of 1964, Singapore, 1967, pp. 388-9. and Milne, R.S.,

Indeed, it is a noticeable feature of MIC politics in the period 1955-1959, that some of the most able leaders defected to other parties, principally the Labour Party and the Peoples Progressive Party. As a result, Indian leadership was dangerously dispersed amongst numerous, often opposing political parties. Moreover, the MIC was left denuded of forceful leaders, capable of holding their own with the UMNO and the MCA elite. Consequently all too often the MIC was the weak and exploited partner in the Alliance.

The MIC And The Alliance: Transition To Communal Politics

In May 1950 the MIC announced its intention to abandon its constitutional boycott and re-enter formal politics. However, two of the most prominent characteristics of the evolving Malayan political scene in the early 1950s were the emergence of mass politics (inevitably as the country moved towards elections) and the development of communalism, exemplified in the UMNO-MCA Alliance. The MIC, lacking mass support within the Indian community, and staunchly opposed to communalism, found it extremely difficult to adjust to this political environment.

The MIC lacked mass support essentially because, as has been explained at length earlier, the Indian community itself was so divided. Its strong stand against communalism needs further explanation. Essentially it derived from the Party's attachment to the ideology of the Indian National Congress, which had itself from its earliest days espoused non-communalism. The horrors of Partition in 1947 merely reinforced that belief, in both the Indian National Congress and the MIC. The experiences of the MIC as a member of the non-communal AMCJA, further strengthened this outlook. Finally, there was an important practical consideration. Were politics to be set along purely communal lines, the MIC would inevitably be condemned to electoral oblivion. On the other hand, given the political experience and educational achievements of the Indian political elite, they were in a strong position to influence effectively, if not dominate, political parties organized along non-communal lines.

By early 1950 the MIC was, of course, acutely aware of the vulnerability of its political position and the Party began to search for electoral partners. For example, in August 1950 Thivy urged the MIC to co-operate with the UMNO-MCA in the forthcoming municipal elections, a call which was repeated by the All Malayan Indian Congress Committee the following November.⁽¹⁾ Then, at the annual general meeting of the MCA in April 1951, Tan Cheng Lock proposed the formation of a 'new united Malayan national organization or party with a new constitution in which members of all races' would be included.⁽²⁾ But though some sections of the MIC responded enthusiastically to this proposal, nothing came of it.⁽³⁾

As an alternative to the creation of a new, non-communal party, embracing all three races, the three established parties occasionally attempted to open their ranks to members of the other communities. Indeed, as early as May 1949, the UMNO, under pressure from Dato Onn, had accepted the principle of associate membership for non-Malays.⁽⁴⁾ However, in November 1950, the UMNO rejected further proposals by Dato Onn to admit non-Malays on equal terms to the Malays.⁽⁵⁾ At this point, Data Onn left the UMNO to establish the IMP. Meanwhile

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- (1) Tamil Nesan, 12 August 1950, 20 November 1950; Minutes of All Malayan Indian Congress Committee Meeting, 19 November 1950 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).
- (2) Presidential Address at annual general meeting of the MCA, Kuala Lumpur, 21 April 1951 (Tan Cheng Lock Papers, Kuala Lumpur); Malaya Nanban, 23 April 1951.
- (3) Minutes of fifth annual general meeting of the MIC branch in Kuala Lumpur, 17 May 1951 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur); Straits Times, 19 May 1951.
- (4) Straits Times, 30 May 1949.
- (5) Ibid., 21 November 1950.

in March 1950, the MCA, ever watchful of the UMNO and its ambitions, had begun to admit non-Chinese as associate members with limited rights.⁽⁶⁾

Inevitably the MIC soon began to consider proposals for enticing members of other races into its organization. In April 1950, the MIC was urged by the Bungsar branch to admit all races but this was rejected as 'premature'.⁽⁷⁾ However, in January 1951, the MIC working committee unanimously decided that non-Indians be admitted to the Party, but it was not until October 1952 that this decision came into effect.⁽⁸⁾ It cannot be said that the inclusion of non-Indians substantially affected the organization or programme of the MIC. However, at heart, the MIC remained committed to non-communalism. Therefore, when Dato Onn established his non-communal IMP in September 1951, the MIC immediately abandoned all thoughts of an alliance with the UMNO and MCA, and threw its weight behind the new party. The MIC gave its support to Dato Onn, essentially on ideological grounds, most notably his commitment at this stage to non-communalism and to a democratic, egalitarian society. But in practical terms, the alignment was a disaster. Between 1951 and 1953 the IMP suffered humiliation at the polls.⁽⁹⁾ Moreover, as the MIC

(6) Tamil Nesan, 20 March 1950.

(7) Indian Daily Mail, 27 April 1950.

(8) Minutes of MIC Working Committee Meeting, Seremban, 6 January 1951 (MIC Hqrs. File 25A); Straits Times, 27 October 1952. By September 1953 the associate membership of the MIC had reached 1000 - Presidential Address at All Malayan Indian Congress Committee Meeting, Kuala Lumpur, 13 September 1953 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(9) Vasil, op.cit., pp. 58-60, 81-82.

allowed its members to stand for elections only on IMP or independent tickets for fear of arousing communal feelings, the Party lost the opportunity to gain valuable electoral experience, and direct familiarity with politics at a national level.

Important factions within the MIC saw all too clearly these dangers. V.J. Somasundaram, an executive of the Selangor MIC, predicted that the almost universal disenchantment with Dato Onn would soon reduce the IMP to 'just another Indian organization'.⁽¹⁰⁾ He argued strongly that the MIC could survive only by joining the UMNO-MCA Alliance.⁽¹¹⁾ Such warnings went unheeded by Devaser and his advisers, for the MIC working committee were deeply suspicious of the Alliance 'which will only perpetuate communalism in a collective way'.⁽¹²⁾ In a letter to the Straits Times, John Jacob, Secretary of the Singapore Regional Congress, alleged that the Alliance was 'only a device to consolidate Chinese political and economic power', for which charge he was severely attacked by Tan Cheng Lock.⁽¹³⁾

No matter how clearly Somasundaram and his associates outlined the dangers of the MIC remaining outside the UMNO-MCA Alliance, the Party leadership found it extremely difficult to embrace communalism. The scattered, though frequent, communal disturbances in India throughout these years served as a constant reminder of

(10) Straits Times, 29 February 1952.

(11) Memorandum by V.J. Somasundaram, Lecturer, Technical College, Kuala Lumpur and MIC Working Committee member, on 'Formation of a new Party', n.d. (possible date, late 1952 or early 1953, MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(12) Minutes of MIC Working Committee Meeting, Kuala Lumpur, 24 February 1952 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(13) Straits Times, 18 July 1953; Tamil Nesan, 20 July 1953.

the potential excesses of racial identity. In fact, at this time the MIC saw its role essentially as a leader of minority communities.⁽¹⁴⁾ The Indians constituted about eleven per cent of the population; in alliance with other minorities, for example, the Ceylonese and the Eurasians, they formed fourteen per cent. In his Presidential Address to the annual session of the MIC in 1953, Devaser argued that no Government could afford to ignore such a substantial minority and he suggested that the Party 'might call a meeting of the minorities so that we could take a united stand in the national struggle of Malaya'.⁽¹⁵⁾ Nothing came of this.

The political isolation of the MIC was increased by the constitutional and political reforms introduced by the Government in the early 1950s. No Indians were appointed to the Cabinet in 1951 and when two additional members were appointed in 1953, the Indians were again passed over.⁽¹⁶⁾ This failure to achieve nomination for office was compounded by failure at the polls. The Party's electoral successes in 1951-53 had been restricted to those constituencies which had a majority of Indian electors (most notably, Bungsar-Brickfields) or where there was substantial support for the Labour Party (most notably Penang).⁽¹⁷⁾ Moreover, those rare successes had been achieved in the name of the IMP or the Labour Party. When, in early 1954, the Government announced the constituency boundaries for the forthcoming Federal Elections, it

(14) In May 1953, the President of the Penang MIC declared that the minorities needed 'guidance and direction from Indians'. Tamil Nesan, 2 May 1953.

(15) Presidential Address at the seventh Annual Session of the MIC at Ipoh, 9-10 May 1953 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(16) Of the eleven members of the Cabinet, six were Europeans, three Malays, one Chinese, one Ceylonese - Indian Daily Mail, 14 March 1951. In 1953 the two new members were Dr. Ismail and H.S. Lee.

(17) See Chapter V, pp. 156-158.

became apparent that in no constituency would there be a majority of Indian voters.⁽¹⁸⁾ Immediately the MIC agitated for reserved seats.⁽¹⁹⁾ Their request was rejected by the Government; they appealed to the Colonial Secretary, Oliver Lyttleton and to the Malay Rulers; again they were refused.⁽²⁰⁾

This controversy over reserved seats dealt a major blow to the non-communal ideology of the MIC. For all its talk of the dangers of communalism, the MIC, faced with political extinction through the polls, had instinctively reached for the house remedy of the communalist - the reserved seat. Moreover, this came at a time when the Party's association with Dato Onn was under severe strain. In April 1953, Dato Onn and Dato Panglima Bukit Gantang (Mentri Besar of Perak) inaugurated the National Conference, the declared aim of which was to create a National Front for 'building a united, self-governing Malayan nation'.⁽²¹⁾ Representatives from each of the major political parties, and many relatively insignificant organizations, were invited to attend. The UMNO-MCA refused to become associated with a coalition 'dominated by high administrative officers of the Government and by individuals who are not the accredited leaders of any section of the people of this country'.⁽²²⁾

(18) See Federation of Malaya, Report of the Constituency Delineation Commission, No. 36 of 1954.

(19) See Chapter V, pp. 159-161.

(20) Tamil Nesan, 27 April 1954; Singapore Tiger Standard, 4 May 1954, 28 May 1954.

(21) Tamil Nesan, 29 April 1953.

(22) Reply of the UMNO-MCA to invitation from Dato Panglima Bukit Gantang, signed by Tunku Abdul Rahman and Tan Cheng Lock, n.d. (Tan Cheng Lock Papers, Kuala Lumpur). This description by the UMNO-MCA referred to the fact that the National Conference contained seven Mentris Besar.

The MIC agreed with this view but added that 'there should be no hesitation in making use of individuals if they had political or intellectual gifts'.⁽²³⁾ On this basis they sent K. Ramanathan and Devaser to the National Conference.

In August 1953, in opposition to Dato Onn's National Conference, the UMNO-MCA organized a National Convention to which it invited the MIC.⁽²⁴⁾ Devaser and Balakrishnan were in favour of accepting this invitation, provided that the UMNO-MCA were prepared to support certain constitutional and citizenship reforms.⁽²⁵⁾ But Devaser's response was strongly opposed within the MIC, most notably by Jagjit Singh, President of the Penang MIC, who was annoyed by the failure of the Alliance to attend Dato Onn's National Conference. the previous April, despite repeated invitations from the MIC.⁽²⁶⁾ He was also irritated by the fact that the proposed National Convention had been planned solely by the UMNO-MCA, without consulting minority parties.⁽²⁷⁾ This seemed to indicate that at heart the Alliance cared little for minority interests. Therefore, the Alliance's invitation was rejected, the MIC arguing that two conferences with identical objectives would seriously hinder the independence movement.⁽²⁸⁾ However it was clear that if the Alliance wished to claim leadership of the independence movement, it could ill-afford to neglect the minority races, and indeed

(23) Tamil Nesan, 29 April 1953.

(24) Ibid., 24 August 1953.

(25) Minutes of MIC Working Committee Meeting, Penang, 9 August 1953 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(26) Ibid.

(27) Ibid.

(28) Tamil Nesan, 15 August 1953.

Tan Cheng Lock went out of his way to reassure the minority communities, principally the Indians, that the Alliance wished to consult fully with them.⁽²⁹⁾

Meanwhile the MIC and the National Conference were becoming estranged. Dato Onn who dominated the National Conference, wished to press for the postponement of Federal elections until late 1956, simply because the IMP feared severe electoral defeat.⁽³⁰⁾ The MIC refused to accept this, partly because such postponement would inevitably delay the coming of self-government.⁽³¹⁾ It rejected an argument put forward by Onn that the registration of voters would take several years, for even in India in 1947 voter registration had taken only six months; the MIC insisted on elections in 1954.⁽³²⁾ The MIC was also annoyed by the fact that it had been allotted only two seats in the National Conference, which placed it on the same footing as such parties as the Ceylon Federation of Malaya and the Straits Chinese British Association.⁽³³⁾ In September 1953 the National Conference Working Committee issued a report which called for, among other things, the postponement of Federal Elections until late 1956.⁽³⁴⁾ It also suggested that more than half the members of the Legislative Council should be nominated.⁽³⁵⁾ The MIC, which had insisted on Federal Elections in 1954 and on a fully-elected Assembly, promptly left the Conference, though this decision

(29) Tan Cheng Lock's address at the Alliance Meeting in Taiping, n.d. (Tan Cheng Lock Papers, Kuala Lumpur). He emphasised that 'there cannot be and will never be any question of the Alliance adopting a dog in the manger attitude'.

(30) Straits Times, 24 August 1953.

(31) Malay Mail, 28 September 1953.

(32) Ibid.

(33) Malay Mail, 1 September 1953. It need hardly be reiterated that the MIC, with a membership of 20,000, formed by far the largest political force in the National Conference. Malay Mail, 5 September 1953.

(34) Ibid., 28 September 1953; Means, op.cit., p. 143.

(35) Tamil Nesan, 28 September 1953; Means, op.cit., p. 143.

was criticized by the Singapore Regional Congress and the Tamil Nesan.⁽³⁶⁾

The departure of the MIC from the National Conference came at a time when the British were also re-assessing their attitude to Dato Onn. From as early as 1950, Dato Onn had been regarded by the authorities as the leader of the Malayan peoples, despite his electoral defeats. This was shown by the fact that in 1953, thirty of the seventy-five nominated members in the Legislative Council were from the IMP and the fact that the Federal Elections Committee, appointed by the Government in May the same year, contained a majority of IMP members.⁽³⁷⁾ However by late 1953, Dato Onn had become increasingly extreme in his views, adopting a strong pro-Malay stance. The Party Negara, formed by Onn in February 1954, had among its aims the creation of an Islamic state, severe immigration restrictions and stringent citizenship regulations.⁽³⁸⁾ The fact that both British and Indian support for Dato Onn was at its height between 1950 and 1953, and that both withdrew their support after November 1953, is of course not purely coincidental. In the earlier phase, Dato Onn was the most promising leader in Malaya, while in late 1953, his extremism forced both the British and the MIC to disentangle themselves from him.⁽³⁹⁾

(36) Tamil Nesan, 28 September 1953; Malay Mail, 1 October 1953.

(37) Straits Times, 25 June 1953; Federation of Malaya, Introduction of Elections to the Federal Legislative Council, Council Paper No. 21 of 1954; Means, op.cit., pp. 147-149.

(38) Malay Mail, 1 March 1954; Vasil, op.cit., p. 83.

(39) It should be noted however that the FIO and the MIA remained staunchly loyal to Dato Onn despite his increasing racialism. The subsequent move by the British authorities to recognise the Alliance as a viable political force was undoubtedly determined by a number of factors. Two important considerations were: a) the need to nurture Alliance loyalties by early 1953 when the MCP issued a manifesto seeking to build a front against imperialism. The MCP also expressed a keenness to collaborate with the indigenous elites against the foreign imperialists and capitalists. (Malayan Monitor, Vol. 6, No. 6, June 1953, Vol. 7, No. 7, July 1954); b) The 1955 landslide victory of the Alliance made the recognition by the British even more inevitable. The Alliance won 81 per cent of the total votes cast, that is ten times the votes polled by Onn and his Party Negara which collected only 22.4 per cent of the votes cast. (Straits Times, 30 July 1955; Means, op.cit., p. 167).

Having abandoned the National Conference, it was by no means inevitable that the MIC would promptly realign itself with the more powerful Alliance. In October 1953, it was rumoured that Devaser, having resigned from the IMP, had secretly discussed a merger with the Alliance leaders.⁽⁴⁰⁾ Though in general the MIC working committee felt that the Party now had more in common with the UMNO-MCA, it was concerned to ensure that discussions between the Alliance and the MIC took place only after such talks had been formally approved by the Annual Session of the Party.⁽⁴¹⁾ It was clear in late 1953 that there existed a basis of agreement between the Alliance and the MIC. Both parties supported the principle of jus soli in granting citizenship; both wanted Federal Elections to be held in 1954, though the MIC favoured a fully-elected Assembly whilst the Alliance was satisfied with a three-fifths elected body.⁽⁴²⁾ The main barrier to merger remained the hatred of communalism, felt by many important individuals in the MIC. In addition, to many Party members in late 1953, the alignment with Dato Onn now appeared to have been a very serious error. Indeed, it seemed to be the fate of the MIC to arrange bad matches, for the association with the AMCJA between 1946-1948, had similarly been to the Party's eventual disadvantage. It was now very wary of potential new partners.

(40) Tamil Nesan, 26 October 1953.

(41) Letter from S. Govindaraj, MIC Working Committee Member to Devaser, President, MIC, 17 December 1953 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur). Minutes of the MIC Working Committee Meeting, Kuala Lumpur, 13 December 1953 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur); Tamil Nesan, 14 December 1953.

(42) Presidential Address at Eighth Annual Session of the MIC at Prai, 16 April 1954 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur). The MIC later accepted the Alliance recommendation for a three-fifths elected majority in the Legislative Council.

At the Annual Session of the MIC in April 1954, Devaser pressed strongly for a merger with the Alliance, 'the most progressive force in Malaya'.⁽⁴³⁾ Without the UMNO-MCA, the Party would be 'doomed to become a welfare organization'.⁽⁴⁴⁾ To many delegates, the President's unbridled enthusiasm appeared suspicious. For example, Jagjit Singh, the President of the Penang MIC, accused Devaser of aiming for a Cabinet post.⁽⁴⁵⁾ John Jacob of the Singapore Congress, and the Teluk Anson branch of the Party, were perhaps the most outspoken critics of the proposed merger.⁽⁴⁶⁾ The latter had become seriously disenchanted with the Alliance, following the breakdown of a temporary electoral pact in Perak, as the result of a dispute over the allocation of seats.⁽⁴⁷⁾ The Annual Session voted decisively against merger.⁽⁴⁸⁾ The vote went almost unnoticed in Sino-Malay political circles. All attention was directed towards the departure of the Alliance leaders to London where they were to press for the acceptance of the Minority Report of the Elections Committee.⁽⁴⁹⁾

(43) Ibid; Straits Times, 18 April 1954.

(44) Presidential Address at Eighth Annual Session of the MIC, 16 April 1954, (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur); Tamil Nesan, 18 April 1954.

(45) Tamil Nesan, 29 October 1954.

(46) Straits Times, 18 April 1954, 19 April 1954, 4 November 1954.

(47) Ibid., 18 April 1954.

(48) Annual Report of the MIC, April 1954 - April 1955, p. 2 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur). Tamil Nesan, 18 April 1954.

(49) Tamil Nesan, 20 April 1954. The Elections Committee of 46 members under the chairmanship of M.J. Hogan, had a majority of IMP members in comparison to the UMNO-MCA members. Hence there was rivalry between the IMP and the Alliance on the vital issues of proportion of elected members in the Legislative Council and the date for first elections to the Federal Legislature. Thus two sets of reports emerged, one, the Majority Report representing the views of the IMP and second, the Minority Report representing the Alliance views. The Alliance insisted that in view of its success at the polls, its Minority Report should be accepted by the Government. In addition to pressing their demands on the Federation Government, the Alliance also sent a three-man delegation to the Colonial Secretary in London. See Means, op.cit., 147-148.

In August 1954 the MIC, already suffering from severe internal divisions, and indeed financial difficulties, was humiliatingly defeated at the Ipoh Town Council elections.⁽⁵⁰⁾ A meeting of the All Malayan Indian Congress Committee the following month, gave the Party's Working Committee a mandate 'to explore the possibility of alignment with other political parties'.⁽⁵¹⁾ Rather surprisingly, the MIC or rather factions within it, considered an alignment not only with the Alliance but also with Dato Onn's Party Negara. Most notably, S.O.K. Ubaidullah, stood out for a reunion with Onn.⁽⁵²⁾ However this possibility was effectively closed by Onn's demands that he would accept an alignment with the MIC, only if the Indians made a number of radical policy changes.⁽⁵³⁾ The Party Negara was not 'prepared to sacrifice its principle for the sake of an alliance with a communal political organization'.⁽⁵⁴⁾ The Selangor MIC, though it did not support a reunion with Onn, remained opposed to the alternative of an alignment with the Alliance.⁽⁵⁵⁾ First, it was irritated by Devaser's dictatorial attitude, in particular his suspension from the Party of those who opposed him.⁽⁵⁶⁾ Second, the Selangor MIC was aggrieved by the fact that at first the Kuala Lumpur UMNO had rejected an electoral partnership with it for the forthcoming Kuala Lumpur municipal elections, though it later relented.⁽⁵⁷⁾

(50) Singapore Tiger Standard, 8 May 1954; Sevika, 18 August 1954.

(51) Minutes of the All Malayan Indian Congress Committee Meeting, Kuala Lumpur, 12 September 1954 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur); Sevika, 13 September 1954.

(52) Straits Times, 18 October 1954; Sevika, 13 October 1954.

(53) Straits Times, 18 October 1954.

(54) Malay Mail, 19 October 1954.

(55) Sevika, 13 October 1954.

(56) Ibid.

(57) Ibid.

In October 1954 the All Malayan Indian Congress Committee voted in favour of the merger, but the decision was far from clear-cut.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Only fifty-five delegates attended the meeting, which meant that only approximately one-fifth of all branches were represented.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Moreover, of those fifty-five delegates, only twenty-eight voted for merger, whilst seventeen had abstained and the remaining ten had absented themselves from the meeting when the vote was taken.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Though a number of MIC members regarded the All Malayan Indian Congress Committee decision, in these circumstances, as null and void, John Jacob from Singapore and Jang Singh from Klang resigned from the Party over the vote.⁽⁶¹⁾ However, the validity of the vote was not formally challenged and the MIC was now committed to joining the Alliance.

There remained one further hurdle. In late 1954 Tunku Abdul Rahman hinted that the MIC would be admitted into the Alliance only after it had shown that it was capable of attracting large support at the municipal elections in December.⁽⁶²⁾ In the meantime, the Alliance and the MIC would cooperate only in fighting those elections. But the MIC proved its value in December. The Alliance candidates in Bungsar-Brickfields and Tanjong ward, Penang, both essentially Indian constituencies, were MIC members, K. Gurupatham and S.M. Mohammed Idrus

(58) Straits Times, 18 October 1954.

(59) Tamil Nesan, 20 October 1954.

(60) Straits Times, 18 October 1954.

(61) Ibid., 22 October 1954, 4 November 1954. Jang Singh, President, Klang MIC and an MIC Working Committee Member was annoyed by the refusal of the Alliance in Klang to accept the MIC as an electoral partner in the Klang municipal elections, to be held in December 1954. Malay Mail, 23 October 1954; Straits Times, 4 November 1954.

(62) Tamil Nesan, 15 October 1954.

respectively.⁽⁶³⁾ They were successful. Consequently, in April 1955, the MIC became a full partner in the Alliance.⁽⁶⁴⁾

Predictably these final stages towards merger took place against a background of incessant criticism from numerous factions in the Indian community. For example, R. Ramani, President of the FIO, deplored the terms of the merger as degrading to the political status of the Indians.⁽⁶⁵⁾ The MIA President, G.V. Thaver asked 'what is the MIC? A piece of cake that Mr. Devaser should go about offering it to people'.⁽⁶⁶⁾ The Tamil Murasu, condemned the MIC for picking the 'crumbs at table'.⁽⁶⁷⁾ 'It is well known that the Alliance is disposed to throw one or two seats to small communities and win them over to its side. The Devaser clique has fallen prey to such a move',⁽⁶⁸⁾ To the President of the Ceylon Association of Selangor, M.W. Navaratnam, the MIC had 'sold out the honour of Indians'.⁽⁶⁹⁾ In reply, Devaser told the Ceylonese 'to mind their own business'.⁽⁷⁰⁾

In an attempt to defend his actions, Devaser argued that Nehru himself had advised the MIC to join the Alliance.⁽⁷¹⁾ This was hardly

(63) Straits Times, 16 December 1954.

K. Gurupatham: Born in Perak; educated in Kuala Lumpur; merchant; General Secretary, MIC, President, Bungsar MIC; Municipal Councillor; State Councillor.

S.M. Mohammed Idrus: educated in Penang and Aligarh Muslim College; businessman; General Secretary, Malayan Muslim League; Vice-President Penang Muslim League; Town Councillor, Penang.

(64) Straits Times, 13 April 1955.

(65) Malay Mail, 19 October 1954.

(66) Ibid., 23 October 1954.

(67) Tamil Murasu, 24 October 1954.

(68) Ibid., 23 December 1954.

(69) Straits Times, 25 October 1954.

(70) Ibid., 26 October 1954.

(71) Ibid., 3 January 1955.

prudent, for it gave substance to Malay suspicions that India was constantly interfering in the affairs of the local Indian community. G.V. Thaver wrote to Nehru to clarify the situation.⁽⁷²⁾ In reply, Nehru stated that on his recent visit to Penang, he had advised Devaser that 'if the UMNO and MCA have a mass basis in their respective communities, then this fact has to be recognised'.⁽⁷³⁾ Though this could be interpreted as support for the merger, Nehru was careful to reassure Malayan opinion that 'I don't know the local situation and I am not competent to express opinions about it'.⁽⁷⁴⁾ Devaser also justified the merger by arguing that the MIC could not afford to be left out of the crucial constitutional discussions which were about to take place. The fundamental issues of language, elections and the relations between the Malays and Non-Malays were being decided.⁽⁷⁵⁾

At the beginning, the Alliance-MIC partnership was very tempestuous. There were two major areas of conflict. First, there were disputes over the allocation, between the UMNO, MCA and MIC, of places on the Alliance ticket at elections and second, a severe disagreement over the Alliance memorandum to the Reid Constitutional Commission. In February 1955 it was rumoured that the Alliance would not field any MIC candidates in the forthcoming Federal Elections, because Indians formed only a small proportion of the electorate.⁽⁷⁶⁾ Instead, the MIC would be given a number of reserved seats in the new Assembly.⁽⁷⁷⁾ Devaser denied these rumours and nominated three

(72) Ibid., 7 January 1955.

(73) Letter from J. Nehru to G.V. Thaver, 14 January 1955 (Alliance File, Alliance Headquarters, Kuala Lumpur).

(74) Ibid.

(75) Straits Times, 16 February 1955.

(76) Tamil Nesan, 26 February 1955.

(77) Ibid.

MIC members, Dr. N.K. Menon, V.T. Sambanthan and V. Manickavasagam, as Alliance candidates.⁽⁷⁸⁾ Tunku Abdul Rahman countered by confirming that no MIC members would represent the Alliance in the forthcoming elections.⁽⁷⁹⁾

This reverse for Devaser provoked another storm of criticism from anti-Alliance Indians. G.V. Thaver, always adept at pointing out MIC weaknesses, declared that the MIC had 'sold themselves to the Alliance just to win a few seats and they have been let down badly'.⁽⁸⁰⁾ Dissidents within the MIC threatened to break away from the Party over this issue.⁽⁸¹⁾ Eventually the Alliance allotted two seats to the MIC, in Sungei Siput and Batu Pahat.⁽⁸²⁾ Even then, one of the candidates was Ceylonese, S.C. Macintyre, and hence it was possible for the MIC to argue that in fact it had been given only one seat.⁽⁸³⁾ The MCA had fifteen seats, the UMNO thirty-five.

Disputes over the allocation of seats continued to plague MIC-Alliance relations until 1958. For example, of the twenty seats to be contested in the state elections in Perak in November 1955, the MIC requested two, and was given one.⁽⁸⁴⁾ As a result the Chairman of the Perak MIC resigned.⁽⁸⁵⁾ In November 1956, the Penang MIC, in defiance of the Alliance, nominated two of its own members for elections in Tanjong East and Kelawei the following month.⁽⁸⁶⁾ The

(78) Tamil Nesan, 1 March 1955; Straits Times, 17 March 1955.

(79) Tamil Nesan, 8 March 1955.

(80) Straits Times, 31 May 1955.

(81) Ibid., 4 June 1955.

(82) Ibid., 8 June 1955.

(83) Annual Report of the MIC, May 1955 - May 1956, p. 3 (MIC Papers, Kuala Lumpur).

(84) Tamil Nesan, 6 November 1955.

(85) Ibid.

(86) Straits Times, 6 November 1956.

Alliance promptly disowned the two MIC rebels.⁽⁸⁷⁾ In December the following year, the Parit MIC put forward its Secretary and Treasurer, Sheikh Dawood and M.P. Arokiasamy, as Alliance candidates.⁽⁸⁸⁾ The leader of the Alliance in Perak, Mohd. Ghazali Jawi, ignored this approach, arguing that the local branch of the MIC had been formed only recently and indeed had submitted its application to join the Alliance only a few days before nominations for the forthcoming polls had closed.⁽⁸⁹⁾ To conciliate the MIC branch the Alliance chose as one of its candidates another Indian, Kanagasingham.⁽⁹⁰⁾ At this point Sheikh Dawood and M.P. Arokiasamy resigned from the MIC, stood as independent candidates, and won.⁽⁹¹⁾ The UMNO later accused the Parit MIC of supporting the two independent candidates against the Alliance.⁽⁹²⁾ The matter was investigated, during which time the local MIC branch was suspended from the Alliance. It was later reinstated after an apology.⁽⁹³⁾

The most serious dispute over the allocation of seats occurred in Bungsar. In October 1957 the Alliance and MIC headquarters announced that Gurdial Singh would be the Alliance candidate in the Bungsar ward in the forthcoming municipal elections.⁽⁹⁴⁾ This caused extreme anger in the local MIC branch, where K. Gurupatham was the favoured candidate for this nomination.⁽⁹⁵⁾ It was felt that the Selangor MIC, which

(87) Ibid., 30 November 1956.

(88) Ibid., 20 December 1957.

(89) Ibid.

(90) Ibid.

(91) Ibid., 24 December 1957.

(92) Tamil Nesan, 26 December 1957.

(93) Straits Times, 20 December 1957.

(94) Malay Mail, 29 October 1957.

(95) Ibid.

contained a strong Sikh faction, had been the prime mover in foisting Gurdial Singh on their Tamil-dominated constituency. In defiance, the branch campaigned and voted for the Selangor Labour Party candidate, V. David, who was a Tamil.⁽⁹⁶⁾ The result was that the Alliance candidate suffered a crushing defeat.⁽⁹⁷⁾ The Selangor UMNO and the MCA immediately demanded the removal of the Selangor branch from the MIC and the Alliance.⁽⁹⁸⁾ In response the MIC appointed its own committee to investigate the recent behaviour of the Bungsar branch and the committee confirmed that the local branch had indeed actively supported the Selangor Labour Party.⁽⁹⁹⁾ Three prominent MIC members were suspended; K. Gurupatham (President of Bungsar MIC, and a Selangor State Councillor), K. Annamalai (Working Committee Member) and S. Renganathan (President of Bungsar MIC Youth).⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ Following these suspensions, thirty members of the Bungsar branch resigned en bloc in 1958,⁽¹⁰¹⁾ Devaser, arguing the dissident's case, suggested that the root cause of the dispute had been a failure of communication between the MIC Youth and the MIC President, V.T. Sambanthan, which had led to the imposition of an extremely unpopular candidate on the Bungsar ward.⁽¹⁰²⁾

(96) Straits Times, 14 December 1957.

(97) Ibid.

(98) Ibid., 20 December 1957. In fact the MIC Constitution contained no provisions for the suspension of a whole branch.

(99) Malay Mail, 16 December 1957.

(100) Straits Times, 23 December 1957.

(101) Tamil Nesan, 19 May 1958.

(102) Straits Times, 23 December 1957.

The Bungsar fiasco led to a temporary campaign in the Malay Press for the expulsion of the MIC from the Alliance. In addition, throughout 1958 the Selangor UMNO refused to admit the Selangor MIC into Alliance councils and committees.⁽¹⁰³⁾ The Selangor UMNO was particularly angered by the fact that the MIC had refused to suspend the most powerful member of the Selangor MIC, A. Tharmalingam, who had been deeply involved in the events of late 1957.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ The MIC had, in fact, thought it imprudent to dismiss such a figure, but eventually submitted to Malay pressure, and A. Tharmalingam was expelled from the Party in August 1958. There the dispute ended. At about the same time, the MIC Youth, which was particularly strong in Bungsar, was disbanded.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾

The other main area of conflict between the MIC and its Alliance partners was the Alliance memorandum to the Reid Constitutional Commission. The memorandum urged that Islam be declared the state religion, that the Malays be given special privileges in Civil Service entrance, the distribution of business licences, the acquisition of

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- (103) Singapore Tiger Standard, 23 April 1958. For details on the campaign by the UMNO and the Malay Press to expel the Selangor MIC, see Malayan Press Digest, Vernacular Press Summaries, 15 December - 30 December 1957.
- (104) Singapore Tiger Standard, 23 April 1958. See Moore, op.cit., p. 243. A. Tharmalingam: born in Kuala Lumpur; Contractor and General Merchant; President MIC Pudu branch; later General Secretary, Selangor Labour Party.
- (105) Malay Mail, 26 November 1958. These controversies led to the Alliance National Council Meeting in December 1957 to review its relations with the component parties in the Alliance. One method of control was to strengthen the Alliance powers over the UMNO-MCA-MIC in selection of candidates for elections and in direct control of dissident groups within the three organizations. The Alliance also proposed that all members were to be Federal citizens and this was particularly directed at the MIC which had a fair proportion of Indian citizens. These draft plans, were heavily revised and later ratified by the UMNO, the MCA and the MIC in June 1958. The proposal to include only Federal citizens was abandoned for obvious reasons. See Means, op.cit., pp. 210-211.

land and in education, and that Malay be recognised as the national language.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ However, the MIC demanded a restriction on Malay privileges, particularly with regard to the acquisition of land and appointments to the Civil Service.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ This last point was of crucial importance to the Party, for the majority of the educated Indians found employment in the Government service, whereas the vast majority of Chinese were employed in the private sector. The MIC also demanded the establishment of a secular state.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾

In fact, the MIC had initially approved the draft memorandum, on condition that the MIC President, V.T. Sambanthan, would attempt to persuade the Alliance National Council to moderate the demands for Malay privileges.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ However, according to Devaser, who was himself a member of the Alliance National Council, Sambanthan failed to mention to the Alliance the reservations of the MIC, and indeed gave the impression that the Indians fully supported the draft memorandum.⁽¹¹⁰⁾ As a result, the MIC in Selangor, Devaser's home state, accused Sambanthan of flouting the Working Committee mandate, and in response, the President suspended Devaser from the Party.⁽¹¹¹⁾ In addition, Tunku Abdul Rahman

(106) Straits Times, 20 August 1956.

(107) Ibid., 14 September 1956. The MIC was prepared to accept a ratio of one non-Malay to 2 Malays in the appointments to the Civil Service, educational scholarships etc., whereas the Alliance Memorandum had called for a ratio of 1 non Malay to 4 Malays.

(108) However the MIC later accepted the provision in the Constitution whereby 'Islam is the religion of the Federation ... other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation'. Constitution of the Federation of Malaya, Article 3, Clause 1 - see also Ratnam op.cit., p. 120.

(109) Tamil Murasu, 18 August 1956.

(110) Tamil Nesan, 2 September 1956.

(111) Ibid.

criticised Devaser for leaking details of the confidential discussions of the National Council.⁽¹¹²⁾ The suspension of Devaser caused an uproar in the Selangor and Penang branches of the MIC and also led to a long, simmering feud between Sambanthan and the MIC Youth, the latter being strongly influenced by Devaser and the militants in the Bungsar-Brickfields branch.⁽¹¹³⁾

The MIC leadership also supported the Alliance draft memorandum with regard to language. The memo argued that only Malay be declared an official language in perpetuity. However, the position of the MIC on this was seriously challenged by Tamil extremists principally from Penang who, from September 1955, began a campaign for Tamil to be given equal status with English and Malay.⁽¹¹⁴⁾ In August 1956, the Pan Malayan Tamil Conference proposed the sending of a separate memo to the Reid Constitutional Commission on this issue, though no action was taken at the time.

Chinese reaction to the Alliance draft memorandum was considerably more violent than that of the Indians. In October 1956 the MCA General Committee approved the memorandum, only after considerable difficulty, and only after two important amendments had been proposed; first, that the special position of the Malays be maintained for only fifteen years after independence; second, that both English and Malay be adopted as national languages.⁽¹¹⁶⁾ In addition, the Perak militants, under Lau Pak Khuan, campaigned vigorously for the use of Chinese in schools

(112) Ibid.

(113) Ibid., 15 September 1956, 26 September 1956.

(114) Ibid., 26 September 1956.

(115) Ibid., 29 May 1957.

(116) Straits Times, 27 August 1956; Indian Daily Mail, 20 September 1956.

and in the Legislative Council.⁽¹¹⁷⁾ It was rumoured that the MCA intended to submit a separate memorandum to the Commission on the use of Chinese and Tamil, but this was denied by the Party.⁽¹¹⁸⁾

The final recommendations of the Reid Constitutional Commission, announced in February 1957, demonstrated the influence of these Chinese and Indian agitations. For example, the Commission recommended that fifteen years after Independence, the special privileges of the Malays should be reviewed by the Legislative Council.⁽¹¹⁹⁾ In addition it was suggested that for ten years after Independence, Chinese and Tamil could be used in the Legislative Council, though only under exceptional circumstances.⁽¹²⁰⁾ On citizenship, the Commission recommended that British Commonwealth citizens be allowed to retain both Malayan and their original citizenship.⁽¹²¹⁾

Though the Alliance defended the Reid proposals in public, Tunku Abdul Rahman was totally opposed to the three recommendations of the Commission noted above.⁽¹²²⁾ In response to these reservations, the High Commissioner appointed a Working Party to consider the Report.⁽¹²³⁾ The Working Party under the Chairmanship of the High Commissioner, included four representatives of the Sultans, four Alliance members, the Chief Secretary and the Attorney-General. The Working Party accepted the Alliance's proposals with regard to language and the special position of the Malays.⁽¹²⁴⁾ In other words, it was accepted that only Malay would

(117) Straits Times, 28 April 1956.

(118) Ibid., 19 August 1956.

(119) Report of the Federation of Malaya Constitutional Commission, Kuala Lumpur, 1957, p. 183, Article 157.

(120) Ibid., p. 87.

(121) Ibid., p. 74.

(122) Straits Times, 5 April 1957; Means, op.cit., pp. 176-177.

(123) Ratnam, op. cit., p. 61.

(124) Straits Times, 2 May 1957, 9 May 1957.

be declared a national language, and that there would be no time limit on the special privileges of the Malays (though the Malay head of state, elected by the rulers, would from time to time review the situation). On the issue of Commonwealth citizenship, political pressure and legal complications forced the Alliance to compromise, though in practice, dual nationality was still not admitted.⁽¹²⁵⁾

Though the Malays and Indians appeared content with these final recommendations, the Chinese remained indignant.⁽¹²⁶⁾ Indeed, Lau Pak Khuan announced that he intended to lead a protest to the Colonial Secretary in London, Lennox Boyd, to demand equal rights for all citizens, the unqualified right to citizenship by virtue of place of birth, and multi-lingualism in the Legislative Council.⁽¹²⁷⁾ A Chinese delegation went to London, but it returned empty-handed.⁽¹²⁸⁾ Chinese intransigence stemmed mainly from the Chinese-educated members of the community, who were determined to preserve their vernacular education and to remove their disadvantageous position in a state where political participation depended essentially upon fluency in English and Malay. Moreover, they were alienated from the English-educated moderates of the MCA who, naturally, did not possess the same commitment to the maintenance of Chinese education and culture. Finally, to the Chinese as a whole, citizenship was a vital issue for political survival in Malaya for, put bluntly, they felt unable to return to China.

(125) Means, op.cit., p. 176.

(126) Straits Echo, 3 April 1957.

(127) Straits Times, 20 April 1957.

(128) Clark, op.cit., p. 115.

The Indians, in contrast, reassured themselves that if the Chinese were fighting for non-Malay political and citizenship rights, these would inevitably accrue to the Indians as well. In these circumstances, Indian apathy was understandable, though potentially enervating. The Malayan Constitution, accepted by the Rulers and the Legislative Council by August 1957, delicately balanced Malay and non-Malay interests. The acceptance of Islam as the state religion, the preservation of the special position of the Malays in education, government employment, and land acquisition and the refusal to permit the use of Tamil and Chinese languages in the Legislative Council, ensured the Malay character of the state, while the non-Malays were at least temporarily appeased with liberal citizenship provisions.⁽¹²⁹⁾

Finally, it is clear that in the period 1955-57, the MIC was the least influential member of the Alliance. This was understandable in view of the fact that the MIC was the representative of the smallest of the three communities, though there were other factors involved. First, the Party's standing was constantly undermined by the fact that significant sections of the Indian community gave their support to non-communal parties. For example, the Peoples Progressive Party in Perak and the Labour Party in both Selangor and Penang continuously poached members away from the MIC. The position of the MIC here was unenviable. It lost members to other parties essentially because it was a weak and compromising partner in the Alliance; in turn, its relatively uninfluential position was partly a reflection of its inability to command the full support of the Indian community. Second, to the eloquent and educated elite of the Indian community, the restricted role that the UMNO and the MCA permitted the MIC in the

(129) See Constitution of the Federation of Malaya, cited in Ratnam, op.cit. p. 62.

Alliance, was a constant source of frustration. As a result, the most talented leaders of the Indian community could not bring themselves to give full support to the Alliance. Third, Sambanthan's position within the Alliance was made untenable by attacks on him from factions in Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Province Wellesley, Penang and Negri Sembilan.⁽¹³⁰⁾ All too often it appeared that the MIC President was prepared to neglect Indian rights in the interests of Alliance unity.⁽¹³¹⁾

(130) Means, op.cit., p. 209; Moore, op.cit., pp. 243-250.

(131) Straits Times, 19 February 1958.

CONCLUSION

The twelve years 1945-1957 saw Malaya move from Occupation to Independence. The political changes which occurred were fundamental, the speed at which they had been effected, quite phenomenal. UMNO, MCA and MIC, which, as the Alliance, assumed power in September 1957 had not even existed when British rule had been reimposed twelve years earlier. The change in the political character of the Indian community was no less dramatic: it developed from an essentially India-oriented community to a partner in the Government of an Independent Malaya. By treating the subject thematically in the preceding chapters, it is possible that this dramatic change in the political character of the Indian community over this period has been somewhat obscured, and therefore needs separate emphasis.

For the immediate post-war years, three particular characteristics of the Malayan Indian community should be noted; its political extremism, its involvement in industrial unrest, and its sensitivity to developments in and ideologies from India. Left-wing organizations, but particularly the MCP, found it relatively easy to recruit among the economically depressed Indian labourers whose political horizons had been greatly extended by the Indian National Army. Moreover, the existing sympathies of the Indian labourers with populist movements such as the Thondar Padai made possible their easy transition to more ideologically based organizations like the MCP. However with the outbreak of the Communist revolt in July 1948, militant trade unionism

inevitably declined. The period after 1948 marked the rise of moderate, ethnically-based trade unions with few political pretensions. In this respect it should be noted that the Negri Sembilan Indian Labour Union and the government-sponsored trade unions in Perak and Johore formed the basis of the conservative National Union of Plantation Workers which emerged in 1954.

With regard to the influence of Indian political movements on the Malayan Indian community in the post-war years, three particular strands can be discerned. First was the influence of the Indian National Congress, particularly Nehru and Gandhi, which was emulated by the MIC and Indian elite groups, and, to a lesser extent, the Indian working class. Second was Jinnah's Muslim League which was assiduously followed by Muslim factions in Penang, Kedah, Singapore and parts of Selangor. In general, the Indian Muslims were conservative and pro-Malay in their political stance. For example, they quickly allied themselves to the Malay cause during the Malayan Union agitations and when the Federation Agreement was implemented in 1948; indeed, many Indian Muslims were eager to merge the community into the UMNO. But the UMNO could afford to parry the advances of this small community and granted the Indian Muslim League only associate membership, and even then, not until after independence had been achieved. As a result, throughout the 1950s the Muslims either campaigned for separate communal representation or, reluctantly, attempted to satisfy their political ambitions from within the MIC. The MIC was particularly successful in recruiting Muslim members after it had become a partner in the Alliance.

Finally, there was the influence of Tamil chauvinism from Madras. This took two forms. On the one hand moderate Tamil chauvinism was dominant in the Malayan Tamils Representative Council and the Tamils Reform Association which sought socio-religious reform and proposed moderate political change. These ideas found expression among the sub-elites of the MIC, particularly in the 1950s, and in Tamil journalism, notably in the Tamil Nesan and the Indian Daily Mail in Singapore. In contrast, the militant Tamil nationalism of E.V. Ramasamy Naicker and the Dravida Munnetra Kalagam of Madras found an immediate response among the Tamil workers of Selangor, Perak, Johore and Penang. However despite their numerical strength and increasing vociferousness, the Tamils failed to achieve sustained political eminence within the Indian community in the period 1945-1957. In part this was due to the fact that the educated Tamil elite was relatively small, but also important were serious leadership conflicts within the community and a constant tendency towards extreme emotionalism in its political behaviour.

Throughout the period 1945-57, the Malayan Indian community maintained a strong commitment to democracy and non-communalism. In part this reflected the strong influence of the Indian National Congress. However there was also a severe practical justification, in particular, in the attachment to non-communalism. The Indians, as a minority community, would have little chance of securing their political survival were political life to be organized along strictly communal lines. Therefore the Indians, and in particular the MIC, strongly attacked the Malayan Union Plan on the grounds that it was undemocratic - the proposed Councils being nominated rather than elected. For similar reasons the MIC opposed the Federation Agreement, and indeed carried its opposition to the point of imposing

a constitutional boycott between 1948-1950. However it can be argued that in this latter case the MIC pursued its political idealism to an unrealistic extent. The boycott policy severely divided the Party, opposition to it being particularly strong in the Malacca and Negri Sembilan branches and among the nominated Indian councillors. When the authorities proposed the introduction of elections and the formation of an appointed, indigenous cabinet in the early 1950s, the pressure from within the Indian community to abandon the constitutional boycott could no longer be resisted. Even so it seems clear that by removing itself from the formal political scene in the period 1948-1950, the Indian community failed to give its political leaders sufficient opportunity to entrench themselves in the evolving Malayan political establishment and, perhaps more seriously, devalued its political importance in the eyes of the British authorities.

The political standing of the Malayan Indian community was, of course, more seriously undermined by its own internal divisions. Not only the MIC but also the FIO, the MIA and the Singapore Indian Association, sought to mobilize the Indian community. In essence the FIO was composed of Indian councillors expelled from the MIC for ignoring the constitutional boycott. The MIA, dominated by G.V. Thaver, attempted to organize Malayan-born Indians in opposition to the foreign-born dominated MIC. The Singapore Indian Association led by R. Jumabhoy, was founded, in essence, to oppose the constitutional boycott of the MIC in the late 1940s. It was therefore inevitable that on several major issues the Indians failed to act in a united manner: for example when Oliver Lyttleton visited Malaya in 1951 he was presented with petitions from both the MIC and the FIO. The standing of both parties was hence seriously devalued, particularly as the substance of the petitions differed only in their attitudes to the issue of citizenship.

But not even the dominant Indian organization, the MIC, could avoid serious internal divisions. Almost from its very beginnings the MIC was affected by chronic rank and file disaffection with the leadership. For example, Budh's dogmatism and extremist policies alienated the conservative branches in Malacca and Negri Sembilan as well as the moderate Tamil Nesan. Devaser, President from 1951-1955, though supported by the powerful Selangor branch, was the victim, and also to some extent the instigator, of Tamil ill-feeling. However, it was Sambanthan's Presidency from 1955 which produced the most turbulent reaction within the MIC. This was in part due to the President's failure to defend adequately Indian interests within the councils of the Alliance. In addition Sambanthan's main support came from rural Perak, whilst his critics were concentrated in the powerful Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Singapore branches. In view of these constant internal wrangles, it is not surprising that frequently the British authorities chose to ignore the Indians and the MIC - as in the formation of the Cabinet in 1951 and its expansion in 1953. It should also be noted that no Indian representatives were included in the Baling Talks nor in the Alliance delegation to the Independence Conference in 1956.

The political divisiveness of the Indian community remains perhaps its most notable characteristic in the period under study. It can be explained in essence, of course, in terms of the ethnic, class and ideological distinctions within the Indian community noted at length earlier. One further point can be added here. It is possible that the Indian community enjoyed the 'luxury' of internal political wrangling because, at heart, it knew that even united, it was too small to exert any strong influence on Malayan politics. The Chinese community was, in essence, no less divided than the Indian - by for example, speech group, occupation and place of

birth. But the Chinese community was sufficiently large to ensure that, once united, it could demand a major position in the Malayan political scene. Even with the disaffection of numerous Chinese into the MCP, the community remained sufficiently united under the MCA to be accorded almost equal status with the UMNO in the Independent Government.⁽¹⁾ The Indians could never aspire to such a position and hence the potential rewards of unity were not sufficiently large to force the community to settle its internal rivalries.

It could also be argued that the Indian community's minority status encouraged it to engage with non-communal parties in the 1940s and early 1950s, though, as noted earlier, this preference for non-communal politics also reflected the influence of the Indian National Congress. Thus, for example, P. Sarma, Devan Nair and 'Jacko' Thumboo had become involved in the Malayan Democratic Union, V. David and D.S. Ramanathan in the Pan-Malayan Labour Party, and S. Woodhull, Jamit Singh, Devan Nair and J. Puthucheary had worked in the Singapore Peoples Action Party. The participation of these Indian trade unionists was sought not simply because they were able leaders, but also because their racial origins partly counter-balanced the influence of predominantly Chinese membership. In the case of the Pan-Malayan Labour Party, they also provided a 'respectable' moderate socialist influence in a party being invaded by Chinese-educated militants. The Indian community was also heavily involved in the Peoples Progressive Party, and, of course, Onn's Independence of Malaya Party and Party Negara. The dispersal of Indian political figures among various, often opposing, non-communal parties inevitably weakened the leadership of the community. Not only did it prevent the community from marshalling its political energies in pursuit of interests directly relevant to Indians, but it also submerged those energies in parties with an increasing Chinese character. Indeed

(1) This is not to deny that the Chinese community did not suffer serious political divisions. But Chinese dissidents were never sufficiently powerful to threaten the stability of the MCA and its moderate leadership.

Indian leadership of so called 'non-communal' parties was often little more than a cloak for Chinese communal interests. Notable here was the Peoples Progressive Party led by the Seenivasagam brothers, with its determination to secure extreme Chinese demands.

However it must be recognized that the Indian community faced a serious dilemma. For ideological reasons it was strongly committed to non-communalism; moreover, whilst there remained a possibility that a viable non-communal party would emerge in Malaya to wrest independence from the British (and in the late 1940s and early 1950s, it appeared that Dato Onn could secure that role), then there was a clear practical justification for the Indian involvement in non-communal parties. On the other hand, were politics to be organized along strictly communal lines, then, as noted earlier, the Indian attachment to non-communalism implied electoral extinction. By 1954 it was clear that Malayan politics would henceforth be conducted along communal lines. The success of the UMNO-MCA Alliance and the defeat of the Independence of Malaya Party at the polls from 1952 was the first clear indication of this. The publication of the Federal Elections Committee Report in March 1954, which showed that the Indians would be in a minority in every constituency, merely confirmed Indian fears of political obscurity. The immediate response of the community was to demand reserved seats. The demand was rejected by the Government and the Malay Rulers, but this rejection forced the Indian community into a final reappraisal of its precarious political position. The result was the decision, taken reluctantly, to abandon its strict adherence to non-communalism and, recognizing political realities, to join the UMNO-MCA in the Alliance. This reassessment by the MIC of its position was considerably eased by its growing disillusionment with Dato Onn who, by 1954, was adopting an increasingly extreme pro-Malay stance.

The political vulnerability of the Indian community did not disappear when the MIC formally joined the Alliance in April 1955. As a minority community, again being in a minority in all constituencies, the electoral potential of the MIC was relatively small, and as a result the Alliance was extremely reluctant to allocate seats to the Indians. This seriously annoyed the MIC branches, particularly those in Bungsar-Brickfields, Penang and Province Wellesley, where either strong local MIC candidates were ignored by the Alliance hierarchy, or more seriously, unpopular and unsuitable candidates were imposed on them. The anger within the MIC branches often reached the point where the branch actively supported candidates who stood in opposition to the Alliance; in Bungsar the Alliance candidate was defeated.

Moreover it is clear that from 1955 there was insufficient agreement between the MIC and its Alliance partners on essential issues to secure anything more than a token political alignment. On the questions of language, citizenship, Malay special rights and whether Malaya should be a secular state, there were profound disagreements between the partners. The MIC leadership was, on most issues, prepared to compromise: for example it agreed to accept English and Malay as the only national languages. But whilst the leadership compromised, the membership rebelled. Tamil chauvinists demanded that Tamil be included as a national language, and that a multi-lingual Legislative Council be established. Similarly, MIC branches expressed concern over the issue of Malay special rights, which appeared to threaten Indian employment opportunities in the government service. Finally, Indian merchants and Chettiars, eager to retain dual citizenship, vigorously opposed the acceptance by the MIC leadership of single citizenship. These divisions were exacerbated by a continuous and bitter conflict between Sambanthan and Devaser.

In short, though the MIC may have had little option but to join the Alliance in 1954, partnership with the powerful UMNO and MCA could not overcome the inherent political weaknesses of the party, or indeed of the Indian community as a whole. Indeed it could be argued that it exacerbated them. It should be noted for example, that from 1955, large numbers of influential MIC members, disillusioned with the Party's compromising stance, defected from the organization and joined the Pan-Malayan Labour Party and the Peoples Progressive Party. It is a final measure of the Congress's weakness that its leader when the Alliance assumed power in 1957 was the ineffectual and rather spineless Sambanthan. The dominating political personalities of the Indian community could find no place in the administration of the newly Independent Malaya.

GLOSSARY

Azad Hind	-	Free India.
Azad Hind Fauj	-	Indian National Army.
Azad Hind Sangh	-	Indian Independence League.
Bande Mataram	-	Hail to the Mother-land.
Brahmin	-	Priestly Caste.
Chalo Delhi	-	Forward to Delhi.
Chettiar	-	Moneylending Caste.
Coolie	-	Labourer.
Deepavali	-	Festival of Lights.
Dravida	-	Dravidian.
Hartal	-	Economic Boycott.
Jawi	-	The Malay (modified Arabic) Script.
Jawi-Pernakan	-	Local-born Muslim of mixed Indian-Malay descent.
Jernal	-	Journal.
Kampong	-	Village.
Kangany	-	Overseer of Indian labour.
Kavadi	-	A large wooden decorated arch carried as an act of penance during Hindu festivals.
Kesatuan	-	Union, Association.
Khaddar	-	Homespun Cotton Material.
Melayu	-	Malay.
Mentri-Besar	-	Chief Minister.
Merdeka	-	Freedom.
Min Yuen	-	Masses Organization.
Netaji	-	Leader.

Panchayat	-	Council of Five.
Parti	-	Party.
Penghulu	-	Headman of a village with some administrative and judicial authority.
Ponggol	-	Harvest Festival.
Raayat	-	People.
Sultan	-	Ruler.
Thondar Padai	-	Youth Corps, Social-service league.
Toddy	-	an intoxicating brew derived from the coco-nut palm.
Towkay	-	Wealthy businessman.
Ulama	-	Priest, person learned in religion.

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A. National Archives, Kuala Lumpur.

The major source of unpublished primary materials for this study is located in the National Archives in Kuala Lumpur. Though these materials have as yet not been comprehensively catalogued they are provisionally divided as follows:

1. British Military Administration Files, 1945-1946. These files are further divided into the following categories:
 - a) Administration
 - b) Chinese Affairs
 - c) Civil Affairs
 - d) Economic Affairs
 - e) Immigration and Emigration
 - f) Indian Affairs
 - g) Labour
 - h) Lands
 - i) Malay Affairs
 - j) Police
 - k) Regional
 - l) Publicity, Propaganda and Press Intelligence
 - m) Security and Intelligence

In addition there are a series of files which contain correspondence between the British Military Administration Headquarters in Singapore and the British Military Administration in Kuala Lumpur. Virtually all the British Military Administration Files are open to scholars.

2. Malayan Union Files, 1946-1948.

These are divided into the following sections:

- a) Information
- b) Labour
- c) Public Relations
- d) Secretariat

There is also a series of Malayan Union Files marked 'Secret and Confidential'. These files, which are open to scholars, contain valuable information on such issues as labour relations, subversion and reports on Malayan leaders as well as fortnightly intelligence reports from the Malayan Security Service.

3. Federal Secretariat Files, 1948-1949.

Relatively few of these files are open, principally because they have not been even provisionally catalogued. Moreover, when the research for this study was carried out in 1974 the National Archives were permitted to release documents only up to 1949.

Separate files for a number of major departments cover the period 1946-1949.

4. The Files of the Resident Commissioner, Selangor, Perak and Kedah.

These contain miscellaneous correspondence between the State Resident Commissioner and Kuala Lumpur.

5. Information Department Files. These are particularly useful for 'Press Intelligence' reports and for clippings of minority newspapers, particularly Chinese and left-wing newspapers for the period 1945-1948.

6. Labour Department Files 1945-1949. These files include reports by the Commissioner for Labour and reports from State and District Commissioners of Labour. They are a fundamental source for an understanding of industrial relations in the period under study.

7. Chinese Affairs Secretariat Files 1945-1949.

8. Adviser for Education Files 1945-1949.
9. Prime Minister's Department Files 1945-1949. These are mainly top secret files and contain vital information on Sino-Malay relations, Malayan security matters and confidential reports on 'subversive' activities.

B. As well as the records in the National Archives, there are sources of unpublished primary materials at the Registry of Societies, Kuala Lumpur and the Rubber Growers Association, Kuala Lumpur.

1. Registrar of Societies Files held at the Registry of Societies, Kuala Lumpur.

These files contain detailed reports and correspondence on the various associations in the Federation, from their establishment to the present day. They contain information on the objectives of these organizations, office-bearers, membership and their annual reports.

2. The United Planters Association of Malaya Files.

These are held at the offices of the Rubber Growers Association, Kuala Lumpur. These papers include minutes of meetings, circulars and monthly reports.

C. Private Papers.

1. Papers of the Malayan Indian Congress. These are at present in the possession of S. Govindaraj, General Secretary of the MIC from 1948-1952. They contain a wide variety of documents relating to the party, including minutes of meetings at all levels and the private correspondence of MIC leaders.
2. Thivy Papers. These are held in the Library of the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. They are an essential source for the Indian National Army and for early postwar Malayan Indian politics.

3. Tamil Reform Association Papers. These were in the possession of the late G. Sarangapany, President of the Association, who died in 1974. They are now deposited at the Association's premises in Singapore. These materials relate to the activities of the association in Singapore and its branches in the Federation for the period 1946-1959.
4. Pan-Malayan Dravidian Federation Papers. These are held in the office of the Party in Kuala Lumpur.
5. Personal statement of S.C. Goho submitted to the INA Historical Committee, Netaji Research Bureau, Calcutta, n.d. S.C. Goho was a member of the Council of Action and President of the Singapore branch of the Indian Independence League.
6. Tan Cheng Lock Papers.
These are divided between the National Archives in Kuala Lumpur and the Institute of South East Asian Studies, Singapore.
7. Leong Yew Koh Papers.
These are held at the National Archives, Kuala Lumpur. Leong Yew Koh was Secretary-General of the MCA, later Governor of Malacca and then Minister of Justice and Leader of the Malayan Senate.
8. UMNO Papers, National Archives, Kuala Lumpur. These are exceptionally valuable for a study of the UMNO and its relations with the MCA. Occasional papers relate to correspondence between the UMNO and the MIC.
9. Alliance Papers.
These are held at the Alliance Headquarters in Kuala Lumpur. They are vital for a study of MIC relations with the Alliance in the period after 1954.

10. Pagden Papers, National Archives, Kuala Lumpur. Squadron-Leader Hugh Pagden was Adviser on Chinese Affairs, 1945-1946. These Papers contain useful material on the MCP and the Emergency for the period 1945-1950. Access is limited.

The collections of Private Papers in the United Kingdom, including the Creech Jones Papers, the MacMichael Papers (both held at Rhodes House, Oxford) and the Maxwell Papers (held at the Royal Commonwealth Society, London) were briefly examined. However they were of little value for a study on political change in the Malayan Indian community, though of course they are essential sources for students of British policy in post-war Malaya.

- D. Colonial Office Records, Public Record Office, London. Three series were used for this study.

CO273, Straits Settlements, Original Correspondence, 1940-1945.

These were of very limited value in this context.

CO717, Malay States, Original Correspondence, 1941-1945. These too were of very limited importance.

WO32, War Office Records. These files contain some useful information on early postwar reconstruction in Malaya.

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